

ALFRED

APRIL 35¢

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# HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories  
presented by  
the master  
of SUSPENSE

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Dear Readers:

Some of the best and most eerie story material in the world can be found in the locale where I am pictured on the cover. The spade you see is merely symbolic of unearthing the facts, and just the facts, I swear. Actually all that is needed is an observing eye and a nose for news . . . to exhume a good story.

When I was a boy and with the family sometimes visited an old English graveyard to pay my respects to dear, departed Aunt Bessie who made, without a doubt, the best Yorkshire pudding in the district, I noticed the aura of mystery in certain epitaphs chiseled on the older headstones. My interest and imagination immediately soared, especially when I came across this one:

Here lies Tillie Hull  
She died at twenty-two  
From a blow on the skull

To this day when ideas for stories, or TV films seem hard to come by I often think what rare material could be gathered if only I could take the time to wander through an old cemetery.

However, with the help of good old St. Patrick, whose birthday we are now celebrating, we still find time to keep you properly chilled with the spine-tingling stories you savor, like those in this issue.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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ON THE THEORY that anyone not burdened with a car could well afford a gun, Eugene Montooth never picked up hitchhikers. He accelerated the moment he caught sight of the skinny figure up ahead, the right thumb jutting eastward. The hitchhiker dropped his arm and moved his lips as though muttering a spiritless curse. Then he took three quick steps forward, almost under the car's front bumper.

Montooth threw the wheel to the left. The unscathed vagrant stood on the concrete, bold as a bullfighter, staring after the car. Cursing the man and blessing the light traffic, Montooth pumped down

on his brake. Then he threw the car into reverse, pulling back beside his near-victim. He rolled down the window. "Are you nuts?" he demanded.

"Sorry." The hitchhiker looked down at his dusty boots.

"How far are you going?" Montooth asked.

"Far as I can get."

Montooth stared. The hitchhiker was unshaven, and a good month overdue at a barbershop. He wore the scruffy look of a man who's slept on tax-supported bedsprings and breakfasted on county rations. His denim jacket was out at the elbows, frayed at the cuffs. "Anyone who needs a ride badly

*It has been said that exceptions prove the rule. Maybe. Some experimenters play Russian roulette. Some pick up hitchhikers. If this were your story would it have ended this way?*



enough to jump aboard a fender deserves one," he said. "Get in." Montooth waited until his guest had seated himself and tapped the plunger down on the lock. "Fasten your seatbelt," he said.

"Sure." The hitchhiker tugged the straps out from under his bony backside and buckled them together. "OK?"

"Fine." Montooth gunned ahead. "You could have been killed," he said. "I could have been killed."

"I said I'm sorry."

"I don't like taking chances," Montooth said.

"Why'd you pick me up, then?" the vagrant asked.

Montooth flicked his eyes over to him. "No danger," he said.

"I guess not." The hitchhiker folded his hands over the buckle of the seatbelt. "Name's Bob Smith," he announced.

"Gene Montooth."

"I been standing out there close on five hours, Mr. Montooth," Smith said. "I was getting desperate."

"Trouble in the last town?"

"The Elkhart Sheriff claimed I

was lowering property values, just being in town."

"Broke?" Montooth asked.

Smith struggled to get his hand into his pocket. He looked at the coins as though he'd had a long acquaintance with each of them. "Dollar-twelve and an Oklahoma City bus token," he said. He returned his trove to his pocket.

"You've done some traveling."

"Not enough," Smith said. "You can't leave your luck behind. Mr. Montooth, how many of us Bob Smiths did you know, before me?"

"It's not an uncommon name," Montooth said.



"There were twelve of us in that little town back there," Smith said. "I always check with the phone-book in every town."

"Like a club?" Montooth asked.

"It's a lousy name to have," Smith said. "Like Jonah."

"Cigarette?"

Smith took one. "Thanks."

"Last Bob Smith I knew," Montooth mused, "was a colonel in my old outfit." He gunned past a trailer-truck loaded with lowing beef.

"A colonel? The highest rank with my name I ever saw was a corporal. Of course he got busted pretty quick," Smith said. "What happened to your colonel?"

"Came back off a weekend pass in Wellington with a head the size of a blimp, and flew his B-25 into St. Rita's Cemetery," Montooth said. "All they had to do was shovel a little dirt, and he was home."

"That's Bob Smith luck." The hitchhiker hunched his shoulders and put his fists between his knees. "Any colonel with a regular name would have rode the plane down just outside an orphanage full of kids; and his widow would have got a medal."

"The curse of the Smiths," Montooth said.

"I'm not kidding you. My dad was a Bob Smith, too; and he had the worst luck I ever heard of."

Montooth snubbed his cigarette. "That white box on the back seat is chicken, Smitty," he said. "Pass it up, will you?"

Smith got the box. "Have some," Montooth invited him, taking a drumstick for himself. "I didn't want to stop to eat, so I bought a carryout." Smith picked out a wing. His hands were trembling. Montooth lowered the window and tossed his piece onto the highway. "Don't seem to have much appetite," he said. "Eat up, Smitty."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Montooth." Smith stripped the wing with eager teeth, then grabbed up another piece. "Good!" he grunted.

"You seem to have a lot of faith in luck," Montooth said. "It doesn't run steady, Smitty. Didn't you ever gamble?"

"Craps, once," Smith said. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and helped himself to a drumstick. "I lost everything down to my dogtags."

"Good or bad, luck's fickle," Montooth said. "Look at me, Smitty. I've got a wife, a couple fine kids, a paid-for-car and no mortgage on the house. Sounds good, eh?"

"I guess you worked for it, Mr. Montooth."

"I worked for it," Montooth acknowledged. "When I got out of

the Air Corps, I had six hundred bucks. I cashed in my life insurance for another four grand. Me and a buddy, a bombardier in my squadron, pooled all we had and opened a surplus store in South Bend. Later, after we'd sold beaucoup olive-drab blankets to newlyweds, we moved into the discount-house business. We bought toasters and electric razors on credit and brag, and renamed our place the Kiwi Store."

"I've seen your place," Smith said.

"There are a dozen Kiwi stores now, Smitty," Montooth said. "Xavier and I—he's my partner—gross three-quarters of a million a year. Good luck, eh?"

"Sounds great. Sure you don't mind?" Smith asked, holding up a chicken-breast.

"Finish it off," Montooth said. "I'm not hungry." He flicked on the lights. "Yep, Smitty. I'm the man who's got it made. A real run of luck, all good."

"Ride it, Mr. Montooth. Get all you can while your luck holds," the vagrant advised.

"I rode it, Smitty," Montooth said. "Too long. You know about partnerships?"

"What's mine is yours, what's yours is mine," Smith said. "Right?"

"Within limits," Montooth said.

"Now, if you had a partner, Smitty, and a business rolling along like the presses at the mint, how'd you feel if you discovered all at once that your partner was skimming the cream off before you saw the books?"

"Bad," Smith said. "Especially with this Mr. Xavier being your war-buddy and all."

"Fifty thousand dollars," Montooth said. "Fifty grand short, the whole Kiwi chain held together with phony paper. What can we do, Smitty? Shake hands, stock up on surplus GI underwear again, and start over?"

"I'm real sorry to hear about it," Bob Smith said.

"It isn't just the money," Montooth said. "Our wives are friends. My Mike—he's in the Marines—takes Mary Xavier to the movies when he's home on leave. The Montooths and the Xaviers play golf together, and cut in on each other at the Country Club dances. Now it's prison for one partner, and furnished rooms for the other."

Smith put the empty chicken carton on the back seat. "I don't know what's worse," he said. "Being lucky, then getting shot out of the saddle, like you; or being crossed-up right from the start, like me."

"Your luck will change, Smit-



ty," Montooth said confidently.

"No. I'm out of the game, Mr. Montooth."

"I wish I were," Montooth said. "We owe bills three times as big as our inventory. Kiwi Stores will collapse like a bridge built with too much sand in the mix. Then what'll happen to the thief's kids? His wife? A man who cheats a friend that way doesn't deserve mercy, granted; but how about the innocent victims of his cheating?"

Bob Smith shook his head. "It's a rough world," he said.

"It is," Montooth agreed. He switched his lights to high as the dark loomed closer. The car purred along a curve hedged with scrub pines and beer signs. "Smit-ty, on my way down, maybe I could help you up."

"Nothing can help me now," the hitchhiker said.

"Not even five hundred bucks?"

Montooth asked. "It could help."

"That's a lot of fried chicken," Smith admitted.

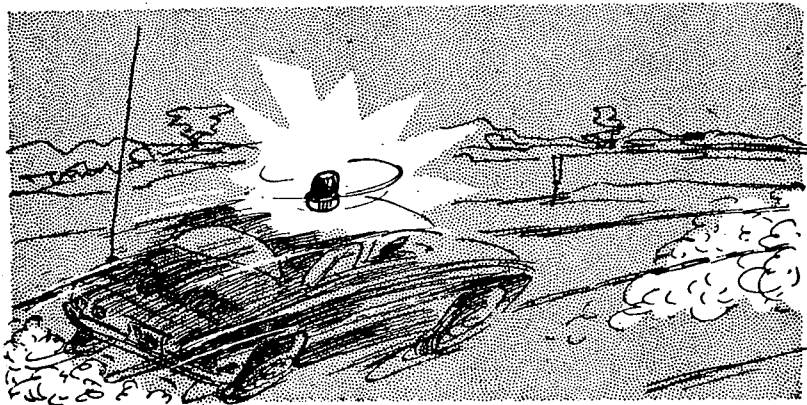
"Look in the glove compartment," Montooth said, his eyes on the road. He dimmed his lights. An auto-transport truck swam by to their left, outlined in flecks of red and yellow like some deep-sea phosphorescent fish. "Go ahead, Smitty."

Bob Smith punched the button. Inside the compartment lay a file of roadmaps, weighted down with a stubby revolver. "Take it out," Montooth said, not looking.

"It's loaded," Smith said.

"Sure it is," Montooth said. "Ever handle one before?"

Smith picked up the little revolver. "I found one once," he said. "Tried to hock it. The guy at the hockshop thought I was pulling a stickup. I got three days and a sore jaw; and what gravels me,





the cops wouldn't even give me the gun back."

Montooth pressed down on the accelerator. "Five hundred bucks," he said. "No one knows Bob Smith, no one cares where he is. Five hundred dollars, Smitty. Tax-free; I won't mention to anyone that I hired you."

Smith examined the gun in the green wash of the dashboard lights. "Even in the war I never shot anybody," he said. "I don't want to start now."

"Think about it." The night roared past the windows, the lights leaping up and down as south-bound cars streaked past. "We've got lots of time."

"Maybe you have, Mr. Montooth. Not me." Smith put the revolver on his knees and gripped it.

"Three pounds of squeeze will spit a bullet out the barrel of that

little gun, Smitty. You got three pounds to trade for half a grand?" Montooth asked.

"It would be murder," the hitchhiker said.

"Sending a middle-aged man to prison for ten years would be murder," Montooth said. "Better this way. If he's killed by an unknown assailant, his insurance could salvage the Kiwi Stores and save his family. Smitty, this could be his lucky break, and yours."

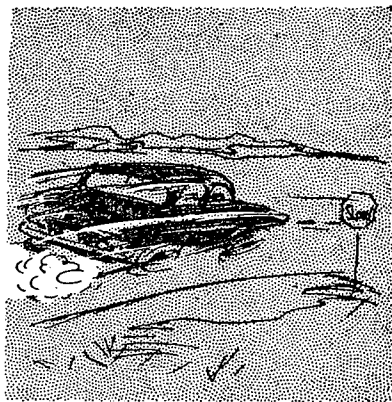
The red light flashing behind dazzled the rearview mirror. "Cops!" Smith said.

"Put the gun back." The hitchhiker dropped the revolver onto its cushion of maps and slammed the drop-door. Montooth was braking, drawing to the side of the road. The State Police car drew alongside, then nosed in ahead of the car.

Montooth opened his window. The one trooper, triple chevrons on his sleeves, walked up. The other stood back at the driver's side of the patrol-car, his hand resting at his belt. "Step outside please," the Sergeant said. "I'll want to see your driver's license and your registration papers."

Montooth slipped the papers out from behind his sunvisor. He unbelted and opened the door. Smith blinked as the car lights went on.

The Sergeant took the papers



and shone his flashlight over them. "Eugene Montooth, South Bend," he said. He glanced at Smith. "Who's your passenger, Mr. Montooth?"

"He's Stanley Kowalski, Sergeant," Montooth said. "Stan works for me."

"I see that you and Mr. Kowalski wear seatbelts," the Sergeant said. "That's commendable, Mr. Montooth; but it hardly excuses you for doing seventy-five miles an hour. Fifty-five is the nighttime limit here, Mr. Montooth."

"I'm sorry, Sergeant," Montooth said. "The highway was nearly deserted, so my foot just got heavier without my noticing it."

The trooper took a pad of slips from his hip pocket and copied down Montooth's name and address. He handed back the license. "This is just a warning ticket. Please be more careful, now. You might hit someone who doesn't own seatbelts." He flicked off his flashlight. "Good night, Mr. Montooth, Mr. Kowalski."

Smith grunted a reply. Montooth sat, strapped down, and closed the window. "I was afraid the cop would hear your heart pounding and run us both in," he said. "Scared, Smitty?"

"If he'd caught me with that gun . . ."

"He didn't. No harm done,"

Montooth said. "So don't worry."

"I'm glad you gave me that phony name," Smith said. "You tell a cop your name is Bob Smith, he figures your picture's in the post office."

Montooth started the car. He followed the patrol car till it turned off, then blinked his lights and proceeded at an even fifty-five. "Well, back to business."

"I don't know," the hitchhiker said.

"Are you worried about the policeman seeing you?" Montooth asked. "He didn't so much as raise his flashlight."

"The overhead light went on when you opened the door," Smith reminded him.

"Smitty, you buy a shave and clean clothes, and you'll be a different man. I'm not worried. Why should you be?"

"I got nothing to lose," Smith said. He reached back into the glove compartment and got out the snub-nosed gun. "OK, Mr. Montooth. We're in business."

"Good." Montooth reached into his inside pocket for his wallet. He replaced his driver's license, then handed the wallet to his passenger. "Take out five hundred, Smitty," he said.

The hitchhiker bent to pull out a sheaf of bills in the light of the dash. "Ten fifties and a five," he

said. "You're not leaving yourself much," he said.

"I can always write a check," Montooth said.

Smith tugged off his right boot and smoothed the ten fifties inside the sole. He pulled it on again and stomped. "I'll walk a little high on that side," he remarked. He returned the billfold. "How soon do we get there?"

"Any minute," Montooth said. He shook out a cigarette and handed Bob Smith the pack.

"What's this Xavier look like?" Smith asked.

"Xavier? Oh, he's bald. Plump, too. The kind of man a doctor makes book on for either heart-failure or ulcers," Montooth said.

"He's got kids?"

"Just the girl, Mary; the one my son dates," Montooth said. "You'll be doing Mary a good turn, Smitty. Like I told you, the insurance will pay back the stolen money and keep Kiwi going."

"How about the widow?"

"The widow? It's hard to think of Winnie being a widow," Montooth said. "She'll be all right, though. She'll be a partner in the business, once the money's paid back."

"I hate this waiting," Smith said. He held the pistol tight between his hands, releasing it now and then to wipe the sweat from

his palms. "Is it far from here?"

"We'll turn off on the next road to the right," Montooth said. He slowed the car. "Here we are," he said. The car turned and jounced along into a deeper darkness, inside a woods. "I wish I hadn't tried to eat that chicken," Montooth said. "I feel a little queasy."

"Me, too," the hitchhiker said. "I'll be glad when it's over with."

They released their belts and stepped out, leaving the engine running. The lights pointed down the road, whitening the trunks of the nearer trees. "Where's the house?" Smith asked. "Where's Xavier live?"

"In Chicago," Montooth said. "Why?"

"You mean it's all a gag?" Smith demanded.

"No gag," Montooth said. "And don't try to back out now, Smitty. I swear, I'll beat you half dead before I'll let you weasel out on me."

"Who's a weasel? I hired to shoot Xavier," Smith said. "Where is he?"

Montooth stood close to the front of his car, shielding his eyes with his palm. "Not Xavier, Smitty. I hired you to kill the man who cheated his best friend, who almost destroyed two families. I hired you to kill the thief, Smitty. Me."

Smith clutched the revolver and stared at Montooth.

"Any time now, Smitty," Montooth said. "Please hurry, before I'm sick."

"What about the car?"

"Drive it back, ditch it in the next town," Montooth said, his voice hoarse. "Hurry, Smitty. Please, hurry."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Montooth," Bob Smith said. He raised the revolver and fired once. Montooth fell. The hitchhiker walked up to the body and fired again, five times. Then he tucked the revolver into the pocket of his denim jacket and went back to the car.

Smith backed until his lights no longer revealed the huddled lump across the ruts of the dirt road. He stopped until his breathing slowed to normal. "I had to do it," he told himself. He fastened the seatbelt. Then he backed out onto the highway, spun the car onto it, and headed north. His foot was heavy on the gas, pressing down with the extra weight of his five-hundred-dollar fee. Sixty miles an hour. Seventy. The hitchhiker opened the window nearest him, then leaned across, tight against the seatbelt, to roll down the right window. Air burst across his face like the jet from a firehose. Eighty miles an hour. A truck, blinking its lights to no effect, flew past on

Smith's left. Ninety. The highway ahead was an enormous white-floored tunnel carved out of the night.

The red warning danced from the rear-view mirror, and the scream of the wind was lost in the howl of a siren. Smith smiled and shifted his five-hundred-dollar boot to the brake pedal. The wind sighed out. The car stopped with a bump on the berm of the highway. Bob Smith took the keys from the dash, tugged his seatbelt free, and got out with his hands up.

The Sergeant leaped out of the State Police car and came forward, a flashlight in one hand and a revolver in the other. He played the light on Bob Smith's face. "Kowalski?" he demanded.

"My name is Smith. Bob Smith."

"Where's Mr. Montooth, Kowalski?"

"Back in the woods," the hitchhiker said. "I just shot him. The gun's in my pocket, if you want it."

"Hey, Bud!" the Sergeant shouted. "Cover this guy." The second trooper came up with a wary pistol. The Sergeant got the murder-gun. "Why'd you shoot him, Kowalski?"

"I robbed him," Smith said. "I've got the money in my boot." He stopped, lifted his right foot, shook out the money from his boot.

"Pick it up." Smith handed the Sergeant the ten fifty-dollar bills. "Follow us in the car, Bud," the Sergeant said. "Kowalski, show us where you left Montooth."

In the State Police patrol car, Smith carefully buckled himself in. "Don't be half-safe," the Sergeant said.

"I expect to die, Sergeant," Smith said. "I don't mind dying, so long as I don't go the way dad did. He was sick a long time. He just laid there, nothing in his eyes but pain, for three years, dying. The electric chair is kinder."

"You want the State to put you out of your misery?" the trooper asked.

"Turn left up here, just beyond the next turn," Smith said. "That's right, Sergeant. The only thing I want now is a way out. You see, I got the same thing dad died from. I eat too much candy, and I'm beginning to forget things, just like he did at first. I've started a three year term of dying. I'm not brave enough to take it. And I'm not brave enough to kill myself, or lucky enough, either. Some people

have to have help in killing themselves. I'm that way. So was . . ."

"Who?"

". . . a guy I knew once," Smith said.

The Sergeant turned the patrol car into the dirt road and crawled along it until the lights hit Montooth's body. The other car, driven by the trooper named Bud, drew up and stopped behind them. They all got out. The Sergeant flash-lighted the body, then flicked the light out. "Bud, call in," he said. "Kowalski, you killed him because you wanted to die. You raced so we'd pick you up and book you, is that right?"

"The name is Bob Smith," the hitchhiker said. "Let me die under my own name, Sergeant," He smiled. "It'll be a clean death. Like lightning."

"You've come too far north for lightning, Kowalski," the Sergeant said. "If you wanted the chair, you should have killed Montooth back in Indiana. You've been in Michigan for the last hour or so, Kowalski. We put our murderers in prison for life."



THE LAKE had not been there before, but that had been long ago. Colby remembered the hills and the little town of Binsville where he had been born and spent his youth. He remembered the river meandering through the valley. At least, most of the time it meandered. In spring, when the rains came, the peaceful river grew into a roaring, uncontrollable monster, driving people from their homes, sweeping away everything it could reach. But summer would come and with it come peaceful, lazy days, and fishing and camping along the river.

Jerome Colby stood on the verandah of the yacht club and looked out over the vast blue surface of the lake. How long ago had it been? He had left high school in his junior year to go south to Capital City. He was sixteen then, which made it thirty-six years ago. It didn't seem possible . . .

"Mr. Colby?" A white-jacketed waiter stopped at his elbow. "There's a telephone call for you, sir."

Colby turned, a straight, erect man of light build standing an inch under six feet, with pale blue eyes and brush-clipped black hair.

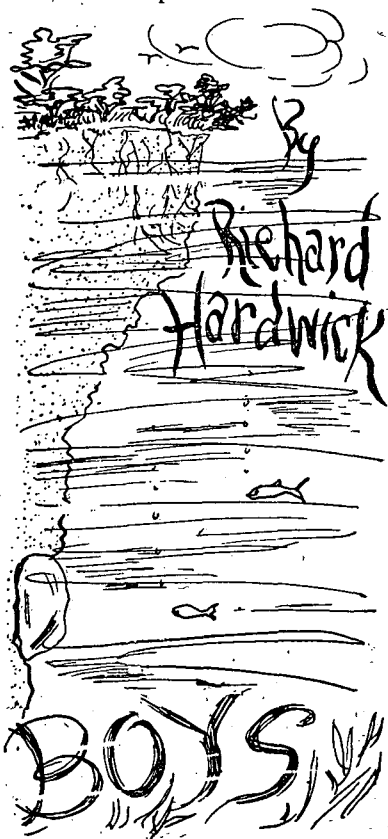
"Is it my wife?"

The waiter nodded. "I think so, Mr. Colby."

Jerome sighed. When Eleanor called, he had to jump.

"I'll take it in here. Bring me a scotch and water."

The waiter nodded and moved away. Jerome ran one hand over his head and went in through the French doors to the telephone. The switchboard connected him, and Eleanor's austere voice said, "Jerome, don't go anywhere in the boat. I'll be up there in an hour."



*A fellow has to summon more than physical prowess when he decides to rid himself of a rich, overbearing wife skilled in judo and karate . . . a fact Mr. Colby knew but disregarded.*

"Right, Eleanor. I'll be right here, waiting breathlessly."

"I wouldn't try sarcasm if I were you, Jérôme. The Twittys are joining us on the *Starchaser* for cocktails. I want you to be sober when they get there."

Orders, threats. And occasionally, an ultimatum.

"Yes, Eleanor. Will that be all?"

"I warn you, Jérôme, I'm getting more than a little sick of you—"

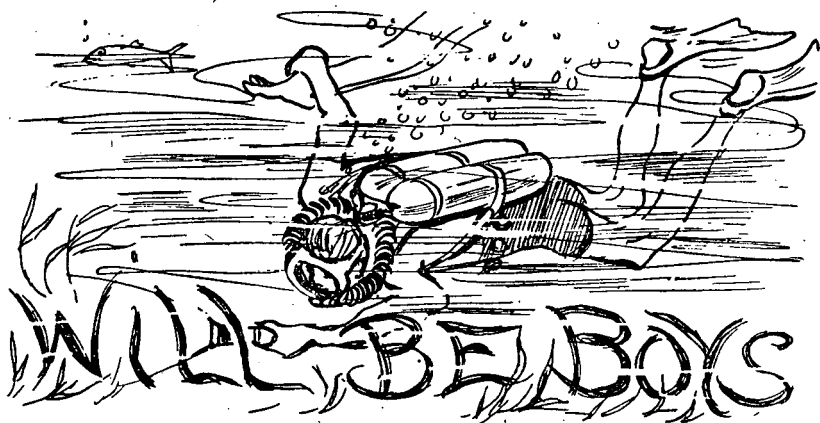
"I'll see you in an hour, dear," he said.

When she had released him he went back onto the verandah. The waiter came with the drink and

Jérôme sat down wearily with only slight hope that the weak scotch would dull his feelings.

Suddenly he lifted the glass and when he put it down there was nothing in it but the ice. He got up and made his way quickly down to the docks where he climbed aboard a long white cruiser. Across the broad mahogany transom, in gold leaf, was the name *Starchaser*.

It always helped at a time like this to get out on the water, even if it was a lake hundreds of miles from the sea and not the turbulent Gulf Stream. He cast off the lines and pulled away from the club





docks. As the cruiser planed gracefully across the lake, he thought of Eleanor. You had to pay for everything, one way or another. He looked down at the spoked wheel. This was on one side of the ledger, the boat, the pleasure it gave him. And there was the money and the life he led and the fact that he had not had to work in twenty-five years. But on the other side of the books was Eleanor, and there were times when Jerome felt that the books somehow did not balance.

Angrily, he rammed the throttles forward and sent the boat close along the wild jagged shore. Ahead, a stark gray cliff rose from the water. At the top of it, some fifty feet above the lake, stood a large boulder shaped vaguely like a man's head. Jerome pulled the throttles back quickly and looked up at the rock, feeling old memories stir deep in his brain. He remembered this place well. In his mind's eye he saw two small, shabbily-clad boys scrambling down toward the river, cane poles over their shoulders and a rusty tin can of worms. He could almost feel the drowsy warmth of that long-ago sun on his cheek, and he breathed deeply, trying to summon the damp earthy smell of the bait can.

He shut off the engines and

drifted. Reaching forward, he flipped on the depth finder. The indicator showed nearly a hundred feet of water beneath the hull. He could almost see the river down there as it had been, moving along lazily, bending in against the cliffside, the deep pool under the rocky ledges dark even in the afternoon sun, and the willows on the far bank drooping sadly out over the water.

Far below, little Jerry Colby used to sit on the riverbank, fishing and dreaming. If the boy could have seen into the future wouldn't he have stared with wide eyes? To see himself back at the old fishing hole sitting at the wheel of a forty thousand dollar yacht. Just the cap he wore cost more than the boy Jerry had to spend in a year's time.

Perhaps the boy would have laughed at it all, because money had not been of particular importance then. He cut his own fishing pole from the thick bamboo stand out on old man Ingram's farm, dug his worms in the loamy soil where the livery stable used to be.

And there had been the cave. The cave had been another world, another life.

Colby moved to the cockpit coaming and let his eyes wander over the granite face of the cliff,

trying to find the little opening. No, it had been lower, down closer to the river. It was there beneath the water somewhere now, probably fifteen or twenty feet down, the room filled with water.

He and Buck had found the cave by accident. On the ledge there had been a small boulder that fit neatly over the entrance and they always rolled it into place when they weren't there so that they could keep their hide-away a secret. But somebody had found it before them. There had been signs of usage, the chars of old campfires, broken bits of pottery scattered about. Indians had probably used it as a refuge from the elements. Runaway slaves may have hidden out in the cave, perhaps Confederate or Yankee soldiers had holed up when they were separated from their units. Deserters may have cowered there in fear.

Now it was gone forever, submerged in a man-made lake.

Colby pulled himself from his reverie. He had to meet Eleanor. That *had* been another life. There was no more connection with it than there was in the recollection of some book he may have read. Jerome Colby was not simply little Jerry Colby grown up.

He started the engines. The boat moved on, turning, and after a

while across the shimmering water he could see the yacht club.

Eleanor was late. Jerome sat on the verandah of the club with a drink in his hand. Beside him Blair Twitty, fat, bald, red-faced, talked on and on about something, laughing too loudly from time to time, calling Colby 'Jer', and generally making a pest of himself.

But Jerome was not listening to him. Instead, he found his thoughts going back to the cave. It was not nostalgia. Colby was not one given to reminiscing about the so-called good old days. Yet, something held this particular thing in his thoughts.

"—one of those battery powered teevees, Jer, that's what you need aboard the *Starchaser*," Twitty was saying. "Living down there in Florida I don't see how you got along without one."

"But we aren't living in Florida now, Twitty."

"True. But I suppose business does come before pleasure."

*I suppose it does*, Jerome thought. He had been puzzled by Eleanor's decision to come back after her father's death. The company was a huge, complex thing, and Eleanor had decided to take active charge of it. It was absurd.

"Here comes Mrs. Colby now," Twitty said, a touch of awe in his voice.

Jerome turned in his chair and saw her. It was Eleanor, alright. Completely regal, with the air of a queen and the build of a king. As he watched her coming toward him, Jerome's face suddenly darkened.

° *Eleanor . . . that was it!* That was why he couldn't get the cave off his mind! At last, after all these years, he had found the perfect place for Eleanor!

Eleanor stopped before them. She was a large woman, not fat, but big-boned and broad with a bosom that pushed out ahead like the prow of a steamship breasting the high seas. There was a look of latent power to her, and this was not merely illusion. Many years ago she had somehow gotten the idea that she was in danger from rapists and muggers, and she took a course in judo, later augmenting this skill with karate.

Twitty's wife arrived and the four of them went down to the dock and boarded the cruiser. Eleanor and the other couple chatted, but Jerome pulled back from the conversation, his mind busy. All these years, ever since he had married Eleanor, he had wondered from time to time just how life might be without her. There was probably little doubt in anyone's mind—his, Eleanor's, or anyone else's—that Jerome had mar-

ried her for her money. That became obvious shortly after the wedding, when Jerome gave up his sales job with her father's company to live the life of a playboy.

By the application of patience and moderation, the marriage had lasted, but there had been more than one night when Jerome lay in bed beside Eleanor, staring up into the darkness, wondering how he could possibly kill her and not get caught. Until now all this had amounted to nothing more than wishful thinking and idle speculation.

"—don't you think so, Jer?" Twitty said, interrupting Jerome's thoughts.

"What . . . ?"

"You look like you were a million miles away, Jer," Twitty laughed. "I said, now that you've been here nearly a month, how do you like lake boating compared with the seacoast?"

"It stinks," he said, taking a swallow of his scotch.

Twitty laughed uneasily. "I guess once you feel that old ocean rolling under your keel, you just never get it out of your blood."

"Jerome will adjust," Eleanor said firmly. "Won't you, Jerome?" "I shall give it a go, dear," he said sweetly.

All that night it burned in his mind, and the more he thought

about it, the more perfect it seemed. He knew he would never be able to kill Eleanor and make it appear accidental. In fact, any sort of person to person combat with Eleanor would most probably end with Jerome in a hospital.

He, as her only heir, would come under suspicion immediately if anything happened to her. The only way around that would be to kill her and make certain the body wasn't found. But even that wasn't enough. He would also have to make it appear absolutely impossible for him to have done away with the body. And the little cave under the lake was the answer.

The next morning Jerome took the boat out alone and went back to the cliff. Donning the aqualung which he had used so often in the islands, he went overboard. As he angled down through the green water, there was a dream-like quality to the thing he was doing. He followed the face of the cliff down, saw the pathway that led from the top all the way down to the river, and it was almost as if the two boys would appear at any moment, barefoot, cane poles over their shoulders, heading for the fishing hole.

He finned lower, and then he saw the boulder and beyond it the small black opening in the stone. He moved toward it. For a mo-

ment he thought it had somehow grown smaller, but it wasn't the hole that was smaller, it was he who was larger.

He paused outside, then squeezed through the narrow aperture. It was tight, but there would be room to get Eleanor through, that was the important thing. And with Eleanor inside, and the boulder placed carefully across the entrance, no one would ever find her. Not *ever* . . .

He waited after that day. The time had to be right. A week went by. Two weeks. And then one day, as he and Eleanor paid a visit on business acquaintances who had a summer house on the lake, Jerome realized this was it.

It was a hot still afternoon, shortly before sunset. They climbed aboard the *Starchaser* and waved up to the people on the porch of the house.

"What are we waiting for, Jerome?" Eleanor said.

"No hurry, is there?" he flicked the switch of the radio.

"We're supposed to have cocktails with the Twittys, don't you remember?"

"I'll call him now." He picked up the hand microphone, pushed the button. "*Starchaser* calling the *Sans Souci*. Come in, Twitty."

"What's the sense in calling the idiot—" Eleanor started.

But a crackling voice came over the speaker. "*Sans Souci to Star-chaser. Sans Souci to Starchaser. Come in. Over.*"

Jerome grinned and pressed the switch. "Read you loud and clear, *Sans Souci. Over.*"

"For heaven's sake, Jeromel!" Eleanor said. She moved to one of the wicker desk chairs and sat down.

Twitty's voice came over the speaker. "Haven't forgotten our date, have you, Jer? Over."

"Not on your life, Twit! Let's synchronize the old watches! I've got exactly seven-thirty. We'll be at the club in ten minutes. We're down at the Hobson's place on Four Mile Creek, and shoving off at once. Over."

Twitty's inane laugh came over the speaker. "Got you, Jer! Seven-thirty. See you in a few minutes."

"Roger, Twit! *Starchaser* preparing to cast off—"

"Shut up, Jeromel!" Eleanor snapped, exasperated.

He replaced the microphone on its hook. "Admiral Twitty likes things done shipshape and Bristol fashion, my dear. It might ruin his entire day if I didn't live up to expectations."

He waved again to the people on the porch and eased the boat

away from the dock. At once he opened the throttles on the powerful engines and the big cruiser sped out of the cove and out onto the main body of the lake.

So far so good. His eyes scanned the darkening surface of the water. Not one boat in sight. The lake lay flat and motionless as a pane of glass, and this too was in his favor. There would be no necessity for anchoring in the deep water alongside the cliff.

There was a definite dryness to his mouth. Inside his chest the pounding of his heart grew heavier.

He looked around at Eleanor sitting there with her back to him. It was almost as if they had rehearsed it, striving for perfection, knowing that this presented no second chance and no room for error.

He swung in a wide turn to the left and glanced at his watch. One and a half minutes had elapsed. Ahead, the line of hills stood dark green and somber in the warm afternoon. Across the lake the sun had just slipped out of sight beyond the distant hazy mountains.

There was the cliff, just ahead, less than a quarter of a mile now. He leaned and picked up the heavy Stilson wrench that he had kept unobtrusively beside the helm ever since the inception of his plan.

A feeling of weakness swept over him suddenly, as if he could not possibly do it. But it *had* to be now. If he passed this chance by, he would never do it. He would never be free of her. He stepped from the wheel, the wrench raised high. His eyes were fixed on the very top of her head, and in his mind flashed the admonition, *Keep your eye on the ball . . .*

The wrench struck dead center in the wind-blown hair. Even above the sound of the engines, the noise of the wrench striking Eleanor's head was sickening.

He turned to the controls and pulled the throttles back. The boat was scarcely a hundred yards from the shore. The wake swept beneath the stern, turning the boat, and then all was still, with only the idling engines breaking the evening quiet.

The rest of it had been rehearsed. Even so, it was the weak link in the chain. If someone came along now, merely the most innocent fisherman, the whole scheme could fold up.

Jerome slipped out of his clothes and donned the diving gear. He went to Eleanor and started to lift her. But his eyes fastened on her head, and his hands began to shake. Blood covered her hair and the wound itself was a horrible thing to see.

"I've got to finish this," he said aloud. "I can't stop now . . ."

He pulled her up and dragged her across the deck to the rail and quickly pushed her over. Her body splashed and sank beneath the surface. Jerome leaped in, found Eleanor drifting slowly below him, and towed her to the mouth of the cave.

With the aid of the underwater flashlight, he pushed Eleanor's body inside and secured it among the loose rocks toward the rear of the cave, placed the wrench beside her, then came out and rolled the boulder across the entrance.

By the time he was once more on the deck of the boat, less than a minute and a half had elapsed. With the visible evidence of the deed gone, Jerome felt better. He was quick to note that there was still no sign of anyone on the lake and he maneuvered the boat away from the cliff, drying himself as he went.

He ran the cruiser across the lake and when he was a mile or so from the scene of his last stop, he slowed the boat and radioed to Twitty while putting on his clothes. "*Starchaser* calling *Sans Souci*! Come in, Twitty! Quick! I've got trouble out here! Eleanor's fallen overboard!"

Within a matter of minutes after Twitty's answer, boats appeared

racing around the bend from the direction of the yacht club. The timing had been exactly right.

The search lasted far into the night. First, a dozen or so boats from the club, and later the lake patrol showed up and pulled alongside Jerome's boat.

"She might have got to shore, Mr. Colby," the officer said, his face serious. "Wouldn't count on it, though."

Twitty had come aboard earlier in the search. "I'm afraid the worst has happened, Jer," he said. "I feel certain we would have seen her if she had gotten ashore."

"Exactly what happened, Mr. Colby?" the officer asked.

Jerome shook his head and poured himself two fingers of scotch. "It was terrible! I feel completely to blame."

"Now, Jer," Twitty said, "you mustn't blame yourself."

Jerome poured a drink for the patrolman and another for Twitty. He tossed off his own drink. "I had radioed Twitty from Four Mile Creek. We, Eleanor and I, were to meet the Twittys back at the yacht club for cocktails. Well, we started across the lake. It was smooth and I was running just about wide open. Suddenly I thought I saw something in the water, a half-submerged log or something, and I turned the wheel

quickly to avoid hitting it. I heard Eleanor yell and when I looked around I saw her going over the side. She had been sitting right there in that deck chair, but she was behind me, and I suppose she was standing when I made the sudden turn. She . . . she never came up . . ."

He picked up the bottle and poured himself another drink.

The patrolman shuffled his feet uneasily. "We'll start the search again at sun up, Mr. Colby. There's a skin diving club up here and they always help out when somebody gets drown—when something like this happens."

The officer finished his scotch and climbed down into the patrol boat. Before casting off he said, "When somebody drowns it's, well, it's always a few days before they come up. Temperature of the water has something to do with it. Might be a few days, maybe even a week or two. That is, if the divers don't find her."

Jerome sipped his drink and turned away. He smiled. *Not this time, old boy. Not this time.*

The search did resume the next morning and continued on for the better part of the week. On the third day after Eleanor's disappearance two men appeared at the



yacht club, where Jerome, at Twitty's insistence, had taken a guest room.

When they were shown into Jerome's quarters, one of them, a tall saturnine individual, flipped open a leather folder, revealing a badge.

"Lt. Peagram, State Police, Mr. Colby." He turned slightly toward his companion, a broad-shouldered man somewhat younger. "This is Sergeant Cates."

Jerome nodded coolly.

The lieutenant began. "We're investigating the disappearance of your wife, Mr. Colby—"

"Investigating? In what way?"

"Routine, at least at this point. Does Mrs. Colby have any close relatives? Other than yourself, of course."

"No. She was the only daughter of Edward Conroy. I think she has some distant cousins in New England, but no one else."

The lieutenant nodded. "Mr. Conroy was a very wealthy man, wasn't he?"

"Oh, *very*!" Jerome said with a smile.

"And I suppose Mrs. Colby, being his daughter, was his heir when Conroy died."

"I believe the old boy left a trust fund for his Siamese cat, and a couple of thousand to his butler, but otherwise every dime went to Eleanor." Jerome moved across the

room to the bar he had set up on the dresser. "Would you gentlemen join me?"

The sergeant's tongue involuntarily moistened his lips but the lieutenant declined for the two of them. Jerome prepared himself a drink.

"I think we can shorten this, Lt. Peagram," he said. "You are here to try to find out if I did my wife in." He sipped the drink appreciatively. "It is common knowledge among Eleanor's and my acquaintances that she was stronger than I and quite skilful in such things as judo and karate. In order to kill Eleanor I would have had to resort to violent measures, and I would have had to take her completely by surprise."

"Which is possible, Mr. Colby," said Peagram. "Particularly since the lake was all but deserted, according to our information."

Jerome rubbed his hands slowly together and looked from the sergeant to the lieutenant. "And just what might I have done with the body? Scarcely five minutes elapsed between the time we pulled away from the Hobson's house at Four Mile Creek till I radioed for help after Eleanor fell overboard."

"She is obviously in the lake."

"And the body will eventually come to the surface, and if there

are signs of violence having been done, then I will be in a great deal of trouble. Tell me, lieutenant, do I look like a worried man?"

The two policemen glanced briefly at each other. "We'll be in touch, Mr. Colby," the lieutenant said gruffly.

Jerome saw them to the door, and when they had gone he shook his head and laughed.

By the first of September, less than two months after Eleanor's death, Jerome Colby had settled his affairs in Capital City and moved back to Florida. The search for Eleanor's body had been abandoned, the official report on the matter stating that the body had likely snagged on some obstruction in the depths of the lake and would most probably never be found.

Jerome was perfectly content to coast along on income from the estate, waiting out the seven year period before he could come into the principal inheritance. There was plenty as it was to finance his cruises in the Caribbean and his other hobbies.

The autumn passed pleasantly, Christmas came and went. New Year's. Eleanor was scarcely a memory to him any more. January was spent in Nassau, and in Feb-

ruary Jerome returned to Florida to make preparations for an extended cruise down the islands all the way to South America.

He was going over the *Starchaser's* equipment when he saw a man walking toward him across the dock at the plush marina. There was something vaguely familiar about the face, though judging from the cut of the cheap suit the acquaintance was not of a social nature. Where had he seen that face before, and when?

The man made directly for him, and when he had come closer, he said, "Hello, Mr. Colby."

The voice, too, was familiar.

Jerome nodded curtly. "You from the radio people? It's the direction finder—" "No, I'm not here about a radio." The man said, stopping before Jerome. "I'm Lt. Peagram."

"Peagram . . . ? Oh, yes. You're with the police, aren't you?"

The man nodded. "I'm here in connection with the disappearance of your wife last summer."

Jerome felt his heart miss a beat. They couldn't have found her! It wasn't possible! The cave was fifteen or more feet under water and the entrance completely sealed . . .

"I'm very busy, Lt. Peagram. Perhaps some other time."

"Aren't you interested in hearing what I have to say, Mr. Colby?"

"I . . . I . . . of course I am.

"I came down here to let you know we found Mrs. Colby's body."

Jerome knew he was staring at Peagram, but he could not help himself. "There . . . must be some mistake . . ."

"It's true. Your wife didn't drown. She was killed. Her head was split open—"

*"No! You didn't find her! You couldn't have—"*

"Because she was in that cave with the rock over the mouth of it?" said Peagram. "We found out you grew up in Binsville, Colby. You knew about that cave when you were a kid. Kids don't change. When you moved away, other kids found the cave, and kids after them."

They had found her. He couldn't bluff something like this. Eleanor had been found.

With a trembling hand, Jerome wiped his forehead. "How . . . The cave was fifteen or twenty feet underwater. How could any kids have found that . . ."

"Did it ever occur to you just

why the government spent millions of dollars to put that lake where it is?" the police officer said.

"Why they . . . why they put the lake there?" he said, puzzled.

"It isn't just to have a place to ride around on a yacht, Colby. It is for electric power, water supply for Capital City, and, not the least, flood control. You probably remember the way the river used to be in the spring when the rains came. Every year about this time they lower the lake, getting ready for the big rains. That cave might have been twenty feet under when you put your wife in it, Colby, but right now it's on dry land."

Beyond the lieutenant two men waited beside a black unmarked sedan. They were looking toward Jerome, prepared for any move he might make.

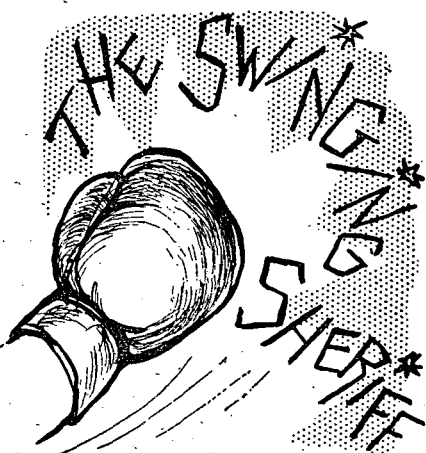
"Let's go, Colby," the lieutenant said.

Jerome looked around at the beautiful boat, and beyond at the whitecaps on the bay. He nodded his head and walked toward the car.



WHEN the old car entered Harbor Bay, (population 994) the small man sitting beside the driver asked, "Whatcha slowing down for, Buddy? You lost? Don't know why you borrowed this old heap when you got a big new car to

By  
Ed Lang



ride around in. Don't seem right."

Buddy, a muscular giant in a worn sweatshirt and dungarees, his young face sullen and puffed, parked before the village's only liquor store as he said, "Knock off the chatter, Artie. I ain't lost, know what I'm doing. I been on edge the last couple days, too sharp. You go in and buy me a pint of the best bourbon." The giant had a high, raspy voice.

Thin face twisted with astonishment, Artie asked, "Buddy, you hear what your mouth is saying? You nuts?"

"Keep talking and I'll cool you, Artie. I mean it! Go buy the bottle, or do you want me to get it?"

Artie seemed about to say something but jumped out of the car instead of arguing. Buddy glanced around the tiny main street, suddenly cleared his throat, and spat.

A stocky, grey-haired man in a worn brown police uniform crossed to the car, said, "Against the law to spit on the streets here, stranger. Don't do it again."

Easing his big frame out of the car Buddy stood in front of the sheriff, gave him a grin of crooked teeth, and repeated the offense.

The sheriff said slowly, "All right, enough of that. Come with me—there will be a fine."


Artie, coming out of the liquor store, rushed between the two large men, asked in a whisper, "Officer, you know who this is?"

"Yes: a man who's deliberately ignored a Harbor Bay ordinance. I'm taking him in."

"You can't do that—he's Buddy Winston!" Artie said.

Buddy grinned proudly, rasped, "It's okay, Artie. This store cop says he going to take me in—let

*Ring history is suddenly at stake when a heavyweight champion violates a city ordinance and comes face to face with a two-fisted Sheriff.*



him try it! This oughta be good."

The sheriff's thick hand rested on his holster. "You're coming with me—at gun point if necessary. Get moving!"

Artie wailed, "Buddy, please don't start nothing!"

The Harbor Bay jail, police station, post office, volunteer fire department, public toilet, and mayor's office were all in one ancient building. Artie had raced to the nearest phone and within twenty minutes after he had made a call, the sheriff's office was besieged by phone calls from newspapers. An hour later reporters and photographers arrived by car and helicopter. The sheriff refused to see them.

Exactly ninety minutes after Buddy Winston had been placed in the jail's only cell a car from the County District Attorney's office braked to a stop and a Mr. Smith pushed his way through the newsmen, into the sheriff's office. Mr. Smith's worried face and tropical suit were damp with sweat. He asked the sheriff, "Damn it, Al, what are you holding

Buddy Winston for. Speeding?"

"He violated Harbor Bay Ordinance Three, Section One, and also for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest."

"Now listen to me, Al. You've read the papers. Buddy Winston is to fight for the heavyweight championship next week. The biggest gate in ring history is at stake, plus a two million dollar TV contract! All hell has broken out in the county seat, not to mention pressure from the state capital. Forget he was spitting on the street!"

"Why should I forget it, Mr. Smith? And I told you, I'm also booking him for disorderly conduct and resisting an officer."

"Al, use your head. There's a gang of reporters outside and if you hold Winston—even overnight—it will upset him, ruin the fight, ruin a three million dollar deal—and the Lord knows what else! Right this second the eyes of the world are on Harbor Bay!"

"Does being a big shot pug make Winston above the law?" the sheriff asked, calmly.

"Al, come on! Buddy was in

prison several times before he turned to fighting—you've read the news stories about him—another rap will ruin him! You hold him and those reporters will roast Harbor Bay to a crisp, ruin your summer tourist trade!"

"All I know is a man broke the law."

"Al, for the love of . . . use your head, think fast! What are you going to tell those reporters—that because a man spit on your street you're going to spoil a three million buck business?"

"Mr. Smith, are you officially ordering me to release Buddy? That what you want me to tell the reporters?"

The D.A.'s man wiped his wet face. "Al, don't put words in my mouth. I'm here to help you. This story will be on the front page of every newspaper in the world—do you want to make the village look foolish? You *have* to see those reporters!"

Opening the door of his office the sheriff stepped out into the crowded hallway to face a battery of flash guns. Questions were flung at him as he blinked, held up a big hand for silence.

In his slow voice he said, "Gentlemen, I have a statement to make. Harbor Bay is a peaceful village and I've been its sheriff for going on twenty-five years. I

guess most of you think I'm a hick cop out to make a name for myself. Well, I may be a hick and I certainly do value my name. These are the facts: I have arrested one Buddy Winston, a professional fighter, for breaking a village ordinance after he had been warned not to do it again, and for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. I've been warned that if I hold him I'll ruin big business, the TV industry, and about bring the world to an end. As you must suspect, a great deal of pressure has been brought on me to release this man.

"I am fifty-two years old and my name has always been on the side of law and order. I don't intend to have my name tarnished now, be made an accessory to a fraud. If I release Buddy Winston—aside from the fact he broke the law—I would be perpetrating a three million dollar fraud on the American people. There's something you fellows don't know—when I took Buddy Winston in he swung on me and I was forced to subdue him, knocked him out with my fist. Therefore I am *not* going to release him . . . for if a fifty-two year old man can flatten Mr. Winston it would indeed be a fraud to allow this glass-jawed bum to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world!"

# THE DEATH



SHERIFF Gil Wyatt paused often during his morning walk into town, once to hear the scratch-stridulation of a katydid's rasp, again to catch the late call of a whippoorwill. Another time he sat

*When a highspirited girl dances once too often with the devil  
she may find death is playing the tune.*



on a stump for almost an hour watching white and yellow butterflies around the elderberry bushes and their swelling freight of berries. Sometimes he just stood, a lean, dark, wiry man turning grey, and almost indistinguishable from a tree's shadow, and watched goldfinches flash high up in wild cucumber vines.

The rest of the time, he dawdled along the Old Mill Road enjoying the feel of warm July growth, and the drama of morning mist holding to the woods. It was streaked with golden light tinged with green, subtle as the green of new leaves. And the air was sharply fragrant with the tang of mint where tiny blackcaps were ripening on the wild raspberry's thorny stems. It was a morning to forget that winter would come again and things would die. Wyatt took his sweet time and was over two hours late getting to his office across the square from the County Courthouse.

A small but potent delegation of Morganville's prominent citizenry waited for him before the vine-covered city jail. There were even a few ladies on hand, and kids turning somersaults on the bruised but resilient grass. Under the leaves and chattering swarms of sparrows was an air of accusation, a tense and angry impatience

with the way things were. The people muttered, flushed and perspiring and tight-mouthed, and moved in toward Sheriff Wyatt.

Lester Giles, Union Trust Bank, strutted out as spokesman. He was a big, angry-eyed man turning to damp flab, and his large hands moved constantly as if there was something big he'd never gotten hold of.

"Nearly 'leven, Gil. What kind of hours you keep?"

Wyatt's smile was thin, a bit cynical. "Sometimes banker's hours, Les. Why?" His face tilted a little, and the sun through the leaves clamped on it like a mask.

"We elected you sheriff and you're supposed to be here," said Giles and wiped at his sweating neck with a soggy handkerchief.

"That's right," yelled Bill Hogan, Hogan's Hardware. His bowtie bobbed. His rimless spectacles flashed indignation.

"Now I'm here," Wyatt said. "Somebody rob your bank?" He glanced at young Jim Allardice standing in the opened doorway of the jail, looking nervous and scared.

"Something better than that, Gil," said Al Greene, Al's Supermarket. "Looks like you got yourself a murder."

Wyatt frowned as an excited buzz broke over him like a bee's

disturbed swarm. "Well," he said softly. "We've never had one of those around here before, not in my time."

"We called your house at seven," said Giles, angrily. "Where you been?"

Mrs. Mudrick, busy righteous church-choir leader with the prim pert hat, moved away from the formidable little bevy of women who kept Wyatt always under sharp disapproving inspection. "We told you to do something about Mill Tavern and women like April Farraday. We told you to keep the likes of Billy Rabb out of this town!"

"I only try to enforce the law," Wyatt said. "The Mill Tavern is still considered a legitimate business in this county, as some of you gentleman know well enough. As for Billy Rabb, I've put him in jail to sleep off a drunk almost every week for the past two years. As for Miss Farraday, I don't recall her ever being tried and found guilty of anything in a court of law."

Mrs. Mudrick sniffed, and Mrs. Schlagg, wife of the Reverend, began to sob. The other ladies glared at Wyatt.

"Well, April's danced once too often with the devil," said Mrs. Mudrick. "Serves her right!"

"She got what was coming all right," a woman said shrilly. Wyatt

didn't see who she was. The fine morning had suddenly turned muggy, the air like warm grease.

"Maybe somebody would like to tell me what's happened," Wyatt suggested, with sardonic emphasis. "What's happened to Miss Farraday?"

He saw young, overgrown Herald Stahl, who played the church organ, edging forward with fat white hands, nibbling at his lips. And 12-year-old Tommy Saunders come forward jumping up and down and waving a pump-action B-B rifle.

"She's been murdered," said banker Giles with dramatic fervor. "Cut up and buried somewhere, by Billy Rabb."

"If you'd been here you'd know and have that dirty fiend behind bars!" shouted Mrs. Mudrick.

"Thanks for telling me anyway," Wyatt said. "I appreciate it."

There were many mysteries of nature in the woods that intrigued Wyatt, but never made him uneasy, only filled him with awed wonderment. But there were unreasonable things about humans that made him afraid. They could have told him right off about the situation. They knew he came in every morning along the Mill Road and someone could have met him anytime since seven this morning and clarified the facts. But they hadn't.

They had waited, savoring it, Wyatt thought, drawing it out. What they considered real exciting entertainment didn't come live very often to Morganville, but was restricted mostly to television. And maybe, if a man could be a sincere student of human nature, too, he couldn't blame them for wanting to make the most of whatever was supposed to have happened during the night.

"Little Tommy saw it at six this morning," said Giles. "He ran in here, was here a little before seven."

Little Tommy, flushed with grown-up importance, danced around in front of Wyatt, flourishing his B-B gun. "I saw it, I saw it!"

"Saw what?" Wyatt asked.

"Blood!" Little Tommy said, wide-eyed. "Blood all over everything. Blood on the ground and on those torn clothes. I saw blood on Billy Rabb!"

Wyatt pushed through them to the door of the jail and looked at Jim Allardice, a sensitive, lonely boy with no parents. Wyatt let him be a deputy during summer vacation from school. "What else, Jim?" Wyatt asked.

"I been waiting for you," Allardice said. "I didn't go out."

Wyatt turned. "Some of you've been out there, I take it."

"We seen it," said Banker Giles.

"Billy Rabb's there. Or he was there, out there right where it happened. Wallowing in it like a hog!"

"Least he *was* there," shrilled Mrs. Mudrick. "He's not likely to be waiting around to get jailed."

"They didn't find the—her though," Allardice whispered behind Wyatt. "They looked around. Just found her clothes and stuff scattered around."

"Where did it happen?" Wyatt asked. His stomach felt sour.

"In the woods just below the cemetery," said Mrs. Hergersheimer.

"I found it!" yelled Little Tommy. "I was down there early shooting birds!"

Wyatt's eyes smoked up a little.

"Rabb buried her somewhere, or put her in the creek," Giles said, with his usual authority.

Wyatt motioned to Allardice and started walking off under the trees. Giles and Hogan and Greene and several others started after him. Wyatt turned and faced them, aware of the eager restless murmur growing under the heating shade of Elm trees.

"We'll help you take care of that Rabb boy," Hogan said, "before he runs back to the hills."

"Sleeping right there where he did it to her," Giles said. "Sleeping and drunk in the blood."

"He's probably long gone," said Greene.

"I've never seen Billy Rabb sober enough to walk out of a weekend drunk til Monday morning," Wyatt said.

"He might not sleep so good this Saturday," Hogan said.

"Bring him back," Giles said, his face flushed. "Get that animal locked up before there's real trouble."

Wyatt's eyes almost closed in his thin dry face. "Who else would he want to murder in this town? Who else has it coming to them the way Miss Farraday did?"

"Some time to be funny, ain't it?" said Greene.

They all started after Wyatt, but he waved his hand at them. Something in his voice stopped them.

"You tend to your own businesses," Wyatt said. "Jim and I'll handle ours. I don't want that area trampled up anymore. Besides, you might get Billy Rabb riled up again and he might hurt somebody."

"We ought to be there!" Hogan said.

"I need a posse I'll call for volunteers," Wyatt said.

The crowd shifted but didn't follow Wyatt and Allardice across the courthouse square.

"You bring him in here that's all!" said banker Giles.

The air was gold under the trees. It trembled, keen as a musical note, in the still heat. Wyatt felt the sourness stick in his stomach as he put the bloody handbag on the log where they had already laid the high-heeled slippers, one with a heel missing, the torn, stained pettycoat, the ripped brassiere, the red skirt. The thin skirt was also torn, wadded, stiff with hardening blood.

They were April Farraday's remains all right, no doubt of that. But her body, upon which some terrible violence had obviously been consummated, was nowhere in evidence. Enough of the daring, scornfully laughing, flaunting young lady's memory remained to attract green-glinting flies. And an eager, hurrying column of ants began moving up and across the rotting log out of the leafy mould.

Wyatt re-lit his cigar and studied the busy ants as Allardice poked around in thick damp layers of leaves with a dead stick.

"Two witnesses anyway," Allardice was saying. He had been sick once, and now his face was pale. It was also stubborn and he had refused to take Wyatt's suggestion and go back to town. "Joe Fobey saw Rabb and her leaving Mill Tavern a little after midnight. Several others in the tavern saw them leave. Staggering, leaning on one

another, laughing, that's how Fobey saw it."

Wyatt nodded. "Rabb never laughed unless he was drunk. And April laughed too much. Lot of it was real. She had too much life for this town. Some of it was defiance, too. She was a lonely woman."

"Roy Crowell saw them coming down the road there past the church," Allardice said. "Heading down here into the woods."

"Roy Crowell can't hardly see in broad daylight," Wyatt said.

"About one-fifteen, Herald Stahl says he heard screams down here," Allardice said. He turned over a rotten piece of log and small white bugs scurried out of the light.

"How'd Herald Stahl manage that?" Wyatt asked.

"He was over in the church. He'd been practicing late on the organ, he said, and you know he does that a lot and sleeps over in the church, sometimes in Reverend Schlagg's rectory. He heard screams, but he didn't come down to look. I don't blame him, do you?"

"Nope," Wyatt said, and he glanced at the white steeple of the church pointing up above the trees just north of the cemetery.

"Herald got new music in the mail," Allardice said. "Says he was practicing for Sunday services to-

morrow. That's routine with him."

"He plays very well," Wyatt said, as though to himself. "He has talent, that boy. He ought not to have stayed here either."

"Don't you like Morganville anymore?" Allardice asked, not looking up.

"I like it," Wyatt said. "I hate it sometimes too, and other times I feel sorry for it. It's ingrown. It hurts itself, like an ingrown toenail." Wyatt puffed his cigar and looked back down at the columns of eager ants. "Like April Faraday. Yes, she was always wild. But she was condemned before anybody tried to help or understand. They have to have something to hate, Jimmy, so they can feel more virtuous, especially on Sundays. But hate hurts."

Wyatt's brown dry hand came down. It touched the worn leather handbag, then quickly came away. "She was hurt bad here in the night, Jimmy. But hate hurts worse, and she'd been hurting all her life."

Wyatt turned and examined the ground of the clearing again. There was broken brush, ugly furrows ploughed and gouged in the warm fertile bed of decayed leaves and black loam. There were bloodstains everywhere and the evidence of a hard and bitter struggle.

"Two years back she was just

nineteen years old," Wyatt said. "I saw her sitting in the sun out by Jones Culvert Sunday afternoon when I was walking home from church. She was crying but when I asked her what was the matter, she laughed. She'd been sitting there listening to the music, the choir singing from the church. She had wanted to start going to church, she said, but the ladies wouldn't even speak to her. Go talk to Reverend Schlagg, I told her, and I remember how she laughed and said to me, 'I'd rather be dead than ask any of them for anything.'"

Allardice had stopped poking in the ground. He stood in streaks of shivering sunlight under the leaves and looked at Wyatt the way he always did when the Sheriff, on rare occasions, said things like this that made him think.

"I always liked to see her walking down the street," Allardice said. He hesitated and looked up at the sky. "She always made me excited. I mean—she'd make me think of going away somewhere to a city or something."

Wyatt walked away from the log toward where Billy Rabb still lay, shivering and hungover. His blood-stained hickory shirt was torn down the front. He was tall and powerful, but gaunt, and his chest glistened dead-white through his

shirt rents like a wet fish belly. He coughed and his hob-nailed shoes pushed at the earth and crushed the creeping gill-over-the-ground, and one huge calloused paw made a spasmodic grip on a clump of catnip. Then he curled up on his side, drew up like a rusty hinge and put his long hairy forearms over his stubbled face.

Wyatt dropped his cigar on the damp leaves and walked over and looked down at Billy Rabb. Billy Rabb gave a low whimpering whine of pain from behind his arms. Wyatt looked at the broken fifth of a bourbon bottle a few feet away. Its jagged shards were thick with clotted blood.

"I drove Billy home to the hills a few times when he wasn't up to walking it," Wyatt said. "Thirteen Rabbs all living in a couple of clapboard shacks. Tenant land, Jimmy. Too poor even for lizards. Says he saw his Dad kill one of the kids once with a harness strap, and maybe he did see it. Maybe that and a lot of other things he'd forget when he got enough hard stuff in him over at the Tavern. He'd laugh then. Sometimes you'd think he was happy then. Him and April would go off laughing together. Why was that, Jimmy? Why, it was because they didn't have anybody else. Nothing means more than that, Jimmy. It means just about

everything to have someone care."

Wyatt reached his toe out and flicked a fly off Rabb's shaggy head. "Would he have done that to the only one he could laugh with, Jimmy?"

Allardice kept on looking, unblinking, at Wyatt and didn't answer.

Wyatt squatted on his heels and looked at bloodstains on Billy Rabb's hands, on his shirt, on his faded levis. Allardice came up behind him and their thinning shadows touched on the ground. A clean spicy smell came up from around Billy Rabb, in almost soothing contrast to the appearance of things. He had fallen and crawled around crushing and rolling in nature's aromatic oils, and he gave off a tangy mixture of mint, bergamont, catnip and pennyroyal.

"July was April's hope," Wyatt said, softly.

"What?" Allardice said.

"An old saying," Wyatt said. "July is April's hope, May's promise, and June's growth. She fought hard, Jimmy. She had hope too. Maybe even Billy Rabb figured things would turn out better this summer."

He pulled Billy Rabb's arms away from his face that looked even paler behind the black beard stubble. His eyes blinked dully up at Wyatt and one hand began mak-

ing unconsciously motivated tired swipes at the flies. Then a kind of horror blossomed in his eyes. His thin neck twisted. He looked at the shreds of the dead woman left on the rotten log and looked quickly away and rubbed his crusted lips.

"You been thinking about what I said, Billy?" Wyatt asked.

Sweat stood out on his boned-out face in still oily drops.

"She couldn't be dead and gone, Gil. She was laughin'."

"She's gone," Wyatt said. "And I reckon she's dead, too."

Billy Rabb's head wavered. He looked wildly around over the torn ground, then at his high-topped hookshoes, at the loam and leaves clinging to the soles. His eyes bugged upward a little at Wyatt, and his voice was tired, numb and sick.

"We looked at the stars up there," Billy Rabb said, still looking at his shoes. Something choked in his throat before he went on. "Then she laughed and did a kind of little dance in the moonlight cause that's the way April was. But she didn't always laugh. Once she looked over at the tombstones and cried, but not long. She said she knew more about God than they did because she could talk to him out here of a summer night. She talked about the Big Dipper, I think, and the



Pole Star and something else . . . the great square of something . . ."

"The Great Square of Pegasus," Wyatt said.

"I dunno. But she laughed. She got down on her knees to me and said we would go away. We'd go away this time for sure, she said." Billy Rabb put an arm over his eyes. "That's all . . . don't remember nomore . . ."

"Can you get up now?" Wyatt asked.

Billy Rabb struggled to his knees, then stood up. Then he bent over and grabbed hold of the smooth white birch trunk and slid back down to the ground, shaking his head and swiping the thick wet from his lips.

"Just wait there and we'll be back shortly," Wyatt said.

They walked in widening circles, looking through the woods. They looked for any trail in the leaves indicating where the body might have been dragged. They looked for other bits of discarded clothing, but found nothing. It was hot and still. There was no relieving breeze in the trees and thick dusty brush and the twined cordage of cucumber vines and Kentucky hemp. There was no sign of April either. There were no tracks, no sign of where she might have been buried

under the leaves, or along the marshy reeded banks of Hamilton's Creek a little way on down the hill. There were two pools in the creek deep enough to conceal a body, the rest of it being too shallow. Allardice stripped and searched the pools, but there was no April in them. There were only darting minnows and a salamander in them, and floating islands of bubbly fermenting green algae where spiderwebs hung motionless in still air and dragonflies darted in and out of speckling sun.

"Who else could have done it then?" Allardice asked, his face wet and flushed, as if he knew that Wyatt had strong doubts about Bill Rabb's guilt.

"Maybe Billy Rabb," Wyatt said. "But if he did, what did he do with her? What *could* he have done with her?"

"She was a large girl, wasn't she?"

"Yes, but there's no trail of her being dragged out of that clearing."

"Maybe she walked away," Allardice said. "Maybe she isn't—isn't dead."

"She lost too much blood, I think," Wyatt said, as he began walking back up through the trees. Allardice threw an uneasy look toward Billy Rabb as Wyatt went on up out of the clearing and sat on the crumbled stone wall that

encircled the cemetery. A grey-flecked squirrel the color of ripe chestnut bounded along the wall and became an arched and fluffy tail floating over the leaves and into the shadows of the woods. The ground under the wall extending north almost to the churchyard was always in shade. It was barren of grass and covered with a fine, rust-colored shale.

"You missed your lunch," Wyatt said as he lit another cigar and looked at the newly whitewashed, cleanly shining stone walls of the church. "It's nearly one."

"I lost my appetite," Allardice said. He sat down in the shade and leaned against the mossy wall. His eyes drooped.

Wyatt looked around at the familiar patterns of gravestones leaning and stairstepped up the hill. Darkened cement angels, cherubims and stone eagles blended in finally where the vaults and larger more expensive markers joined the huge and very old cypress groves at the top. The view was better up there, Wyatt thought, and drainage wasn't so good at the bottom of the hill.

"She was carried somewhere, quite a ways off maybe," Allardice said.

"A desperate man can perform miracles," Wyatt said. "But somebody couldn't have carried her far."

"So where is she? She isn't here."

Wyatt studied the nearer tombstones. Flowers, decayed and dried out, lay on graves below markers that leaned in sunken earth. Wyatt slid down from the wall and walked toward one smaller marker. He leaned down and his shadow moved over a jam jar containing relatively unwilted pink roses and sunflowers and wild violets.

#### IN MEMORY

Sarah Foster Stahl

Beloved wife of Ben Stahl

Mother of Herald Stahl

Wyatt's eyes almost closed as he watched bumblebees bobbing around the roses. Then, as he went back to the wall and sat down,



a bell tolled from the church. He shaded his eyes and studied the white stones and the steeple as the bell tolled only once down the hill and the other way toward town. Wyatt listened, after it stopped, to its last echo humming in the sunshine.

Then he heard voices rising. It was the church choir practicing their hymns for Sunday morning. They always practiced all afternoon Saturdays. Wyatt listened to the low monotone of their voices filtering in practiced unison through the woods in somber waves of sound, ebbing and rising and fading again as furtively as a shadow into the clean gold light of the sun. He envisioned the grimly righteous Mrs. Mudrick leading the choir with her prim pert hat and her black uncompromising eyes.

"What's happened to Herald Stahl?" Wyatt asked.

"Dunno," Allardice said.

"Never heard them singing without the organ before, Jimmy."

"Me neither." Allardice got quickly to his feet and leaned downhill toward the woods. "Somebody's down there."

Wyatt jumped from the wall and hurried down the hill.

"Get up, you hog, dirty hog!" Giles was saying. His wet hanging chin jibbed as he kicked Billy Rabb in the ribs again. "You get up on

your feet! I'm going to belt you."

Hogan moved in swinging a .32 fluted-barrel rifle. He angled it at Billy Rabb's head. Greene, the third man, stood back as Giles hit Rabb in the face twice with a darting fist, then ran back and almost knocked Hogan down.

Billy Rabb was shaking as if he had a fit. His face was splotchy pale now. Little specks of foamy saliva flickered in the corners of his mouth. He almost screamed out of his shriveled neck, "Gawd, gawd, I wouldn't do such a thing!" He didn't seem to see them or the rifle that jabbed him in the throat. He was looking at Wyatt who came up silently behind Hogan and suddenly twisted the rifle out of his hand. He stepped back and stood with the rifle under his left arm. He was breathing a little heavier now in the still dusty heat, but his face was still dry.

"You boys had better watch yourselves," Wyatt said almost gently. "This is bad weather for tempers and dogs. Dogs get rabies this time of the summer and I don't know what happens to people sometimes."

"You're the sheriff!" Giles said, flushing angrily. "And you still let this mad dog run around loose!"

"He isn't running," Wyatt said. "This mad dog can't hardly stand up."

"Why ain't he locked up?" Hogan said. "You leave him here, and he ain't even tied up or anything."

"I've been looking around for evidence," Wyatt said.

"You got all the evidence you need," Giles said. "You better take him in."

"Or we'll take him in ourselves," Hogan said. "If we take him in he may be in bad shape when he gets there."

"Take it easy," Greene said. He backed off and shook his head.

"You won't take Rabb anywhere," Wyatt said. "He's my prisoner, and his rights will be respected. You'd best understand that."

"Rights?" Giles said. "What about respecting our rights? What about locking this fiend up before he cuts loose to the hills and comes back to murder someone else?"

Wyatt nodded. "I'm taking him in. You've found your murderer. You've tried him and judged him and sentenced Billy Rabb. But don't go any further, Giles. Don't try to give him the punishment you figure he deserves."

Giles licked his lips and his eyes flickered uneasily.

"What kind of a sheriff are you, anyway?"

"Sort of a lazy one on days like this," Wyatt said, smiling. "Too lazy to carry Billy Rabb over to the road where he might be hauled off

in a car to jail. I was letting him sleep off a little more of his drunk so he could walk in. If you want to carry him, under my supervision, you go on and do it."

Billy Rabb, grunting and wheeling, pulled himself up to the trunk of the birch tree. "I can walk it now all right, Gil. I feel real good. I can walk."

"All right, Billy, let's go," Wyatt said. He took Rabb's arm and Al-lardice took the other, and the three of them labored off through the woods and into the sunlight and around the cemetery wall toward the road.

"Gil's fixin' to go back to working for a living," Giles said. "I got him elected. I can get him put back on the farm."

"He's a good man for sheriff though," Greene said shyly.

"He's getting old and he isn't right someway," Gil said. "Guess he's an atheist. He don't come to church anymore either."

"He's not too old to make you back off," Greene said.

"Used to come regular to church until about two years ago, didn't he?" Hogan said. "What happened?"

"I asked him about that," Greene said. "He said he was no more godless than the next man, but he preferred, in dealing with God, to negotiate in proper company."

"He won't be sheriff again," Giles said.

"Now that's a question of votes," Greene said. "Maybe Wyatt doesn't have many friends, but a lot of people in the hills of this county respect him. I'd hate to run against Wyatt for anything."

"Don't worry, you won't," Giles said and stomped away in a rage.

Billy Rabb lay in his cell and stared, unblinking, at the ceiling. The sun threw thin shadow bars across his face. Wyatt locked the cell door.

"Everthin' dead anyway," Rabb said, to no one in particular. "Peas stunted and string beans don't make anymore, and the seed corn's burned out."

"You'll be safe here, Billy," Wyatt said. He went into his office past a wall sweating with old yellowed wanted posters. Allardice sat at the desk eating a sandwich and drinking a coke. A mud-dauber wasp buzzed industriously somewhere up in the dusty rafters under the roof. "Keep watch on the prisoner, Jimmy. Doubt if it'll go that far, but nobody ever knows. If anyone causes trouble, set off the bomb alert and I'll come running. It's time we got some use out of that siren."

"All right," Allardice said. "Where you going now?"

"I'll feel a lot more able to find

out who killed her, Jimmy, if I can find April."

Wyatt had begun to sweat a little as he walked down the tree-lined street toward the cemetery road. Once he stopped a moment to admire the glinting color of the light on bees seeking honey from wild bergamot blooms, and the miracle poise of hummingbirds glittering above crimson flowers. Then he walked up onto the porch of the Stahl house. He didn't knock. Grandma Stahl was nearly deaf, especially with television going loud most of the day and night. He went on into the living room, dark except for the shine of television reflecting from Grandma Stahl in her wheelchair. Her wrinkled face regarded Wyatt vaguely as her wizened head angled to the side in order to hear.

Larry Stahl, Herald's father, was usually away. He was a traveling salesman who sold feed. Mrs. Stahl had died when Herald was three years old. Wyatt leaned down and raised his voice.

"Is Herald here?"

"Nope."

"Where is he?"

"Dunno."

"He over at the church?"

"Maybe."

"He's not playing the organ. I

thought he might be over here."

"Ain't here. Ain't been here all night or all day. He's at church. He's almost always in church 'cept when his Daddy's home."

"Thank you," Wyatt said and went out and shut the door.

Wyatt came down the hill, stirring dust along the road's edge. He felt the warm air move against his face. The sun was full on his mouth, then he walked into the cooling shade under the elm trees to where the rectory door, north of the church but in its shadow, was open to catch the afternoon breeze. He knocked and then went in.

The windows were narrow in rock walls. The blinds were low. Herald Stahl's lumpy shadow seemed to hang suspended in the dim light of the small living room. Then his large pale hands fluttered like moth's wings and moved nervously around his face and nibbled at his lips.

"The choir is singing real pretty today, Herald," Wyatt said.

"Yes, yes," Herald blurted as though words had been piling up in his throat. "But they get off a little more all the time, a little off-key all the time."

"That's because you aren't accompanying them on the organ," Wyatt said. "Isn't that it?"

"Yes, yes, that's it," Herald said

quickly. "But I can't play for them now. I got to fix the organ. It's not working just right and I got to fix it."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Just off a little. It's wrong to play an organ unless it's just right. It's—it's the E-pipe. It's got to be tuned some."

"Where's Reverend Schlagg?"

"He's not here. I think he's over to the church singing."

Wyatt's eyes had learned the dimness. Now he could see Herald's fat, almost formless and beardless face, pink-splotched, and the short golden hairs on his gray skull. A soggy shirt and shapeless pleated pants hung on his fat, overgrown frame and his shoulders drooped. He seemed actually to be hanging on some invisible support.

"Do you know what happened to April Farraday in the night?" Wyatt asked softly.

"Something awful. She was evil. Everyone said she was evil and nasty. Something bad had to happen to her, didn't it?"

"Something did," Wyatt said. "You heard her screaming?"

"I was out—over in the church. She screamed and screamed and it scared me. I thought it sounded like a cat. You ever hear a cat scream? Just like that. I heard one scream when a car run over it."

"But you didn't go out to see what was the matter?"

"I was scared." Herald's eyes were wide and bright as he touched Wyatt's sleeve and led him to a small desk by the window and switched on a wall lamp with a flowered shade. He held a sheet of paper. "I got to tell somebody about it. I got nobody to talk to. Nobody listens or cares about music. Maybe you want to listen."

"Sure, I want to listen. Tell me about it, Herald."

"Well, I don't only play music, I write it. I'm a composer. I'll be another Bach one day, but nobody knows it yet. I write it and I got a theory worked out, and—this is it here. Something new, and I'm going to send it in and have it published and be famous. It's about the major chords the way they sound on an organ. Here's the chords on this side. Here's the words that tell what the chords are. I mean . . . the feeling of them, like maybe mood and emotion."

"That's an interesting idea, Herald."

"Like B<sup>b</sup>. It's like a funeral, you know, and it's full of mystery. G, that's sombre. C, that's sinister and brutal—and E is sadness and then getting worked up. Gloom and violent things are C. Hate is F. C and F, hate and destruction.

And E<sup>b</sup> is sad and always makes me want to cry."

"That's quite a theory," Wyatt said as Herald faded back into the shadows, then quickly switched off the lamp. "But right now I'm interested in what happened to April. We can't find her."

"She's gone to hell," Herald said.

"I'm talking about her body," Wyatt said.

"That doesn't mean anything anyway," Herald said, plucking with both hands at his mouth.

"Didn't you go out in the night, Herald, to the cemetery?"

"No, no, I didn't go out!"

"To put a jar of flowers on your mother's grave, Herald. That was right down there by the woods where April was hurt, where she screamed. Maybe you were down there with the flowers when she screamed, Herald. Maybe you saw something?"

"No, nothing," Herald said, backing into the wall. A book made a vague thud on the carpet. Herald grunted as he got down to pick it up but he stayed there on his knees.

Wyatt held out a spike-heel from a slipper. "I found this by the side entrance of the church, Herald. It's from April's shoe."

Herald stayed on his knees. His face was a white wet mask bob-

bing in the gloom and in it were two black glowing holes. Wyatt stepped over there and patted Herald's damp quivering shoulder. He murmured and patted it until Herald stopped shivering.

"It's all right," he said. "Everything's going to be all right, Herald. Her soul's gone somewhere, so her body doesn't matter anymore, like you said. Now you come on and tell me what you know about it. I know where her body is anyway, Herald."

"You do?"

"I think so. But you tell me about it and you'll feel a lot better."

Herald took hold of Wyatt's arm and pressed it to his face and began to whisper against it.

Wyatt sent little Tommy, who was playing on the church lawn in a swing made from an old automobile tire, over to bring Giles and Hogan back to the church. "Tell them I've found April," Wyatt said. "And I need their help."

Little Tommy ran, yelling with excitement, down the dusty road.

Then Wyatt slipped into the side door of the church and stood unnoticed and watched Mrs. Mudrick leading the choir. They sang with a grim, joyless devotion. Mrs. Mudrick's directing arm jerked up and down stiffly. The others stood in two rows before the pulpit

beside which stood Mrs. Mudrick, her bird eyes flashing, her flat heels tapping. All of them clutched hymn books as if they were helping arms. And Reverend Schlagg, whom Wyatt respected because he was growing tired and exhausted giving sincere, impassioned sermons every Sunday, stood there, also singing. He was a hunched tall figure in black, singing loud and thick with the resonance of a muffled drum. And over and above them loomed the huge golden pipes of the organ that seemed to ripple as if it might melt in faint sunlight filtering down from high windows.

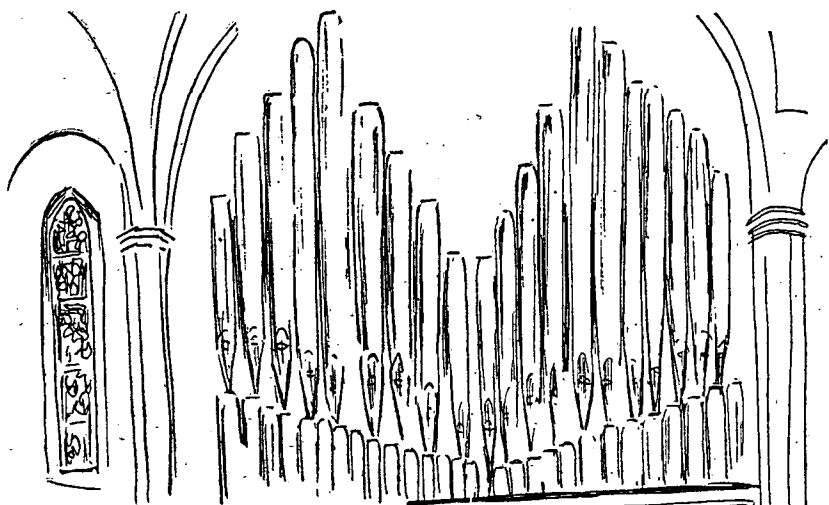
The sourness grew again in Wyatt's stomach, as he looked at the worn rug under the pipes. He had glanced at it before and he looked at it again now, to be sure.

Then Wyatt turned as Giles and Hogan came through the front door and edged uneasily down the aisle. The choir stopped. Heads turned, and Mrs. Mudrick waved her book at them. Then they were all looking at Wyatt as he moved out of the shadows, walked in behind Mrs. Mudrick, and stood behind the pulpit.

"My sermon's going to be brief," Wyatt said.

"I figured you'd come back," Mrs. Mudrick said, and sniffed. Giles and Hogan came on down





the aisle and looked up at Wyatt. Reverend Schlagg looked puzzled and took two steps toward Wyatt, then stopped.

"I'd never stopped coming," Wyatt said, "but two years ago April Farraday wanted to come to this church, and you wouldn't have her. I just want to say this. The man upon whose faith and words your religion was founded would never have turned April Farraday away."

"You won't be sheriff long," Giles said. "You figuring on running for preacher?"

"Nope," Wyatt said. "If Reverend Schlagg can't find the right words, I sure can't."

"Where'd you find her?" Hogan asked.

Wyatt walked around to the



side of the organ, then up narrow worn stairs to the balcony of pews. They smelled musty as he worked his way around until he stood up there behind the tops of the organ pipes. "Come on up here," he called down to Giles and Hogan. They hesitated and no one said anything and they exchanged uneasy looks, then Hogan and Giles made a hushed ascent of the stairs and edged over to where Wyatt waited.

"Billy Rabb didn't do it," Wyatt said. "I know Billy Rabb and he wouldn't have done it, but anyway, he was incapable of such a thing after a fifth of rye whiskey. He didn't have the strength. April Farraday was killed and carried, not dragged, and hidden in this church."

The ladies gasped and Reverend Schlagg moved bony earnest fingers in a gesture of concern and puzzlement.

"Billy Rabb couldn't have carried her. He couldn't even carry his own weight. Anyway, the one who did kill her and carry her here has already confessed. He went down to his mother's grave to put some roses and violets on it. He often does that at nights so no one will see him and make fun of him for doing it. His mother, as some of you must remember, was no better than April Farraday and

got what she deserved, and Herald Stahl's been ashamed to put flowers on her grave in daylight."

"Herald Stahl!" whispered Reverend Schlagg.

"What's the matter with you?" Mrs. Mudrick's voice was a hushed shrillness. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about some of the things nobody talks about in Morganville," Wyatt said. "About the things they don't even want to think about that take place here after dark. Herald Stahl was down there at his mother's grave. He heard April and Billy Rabb laughing and loving a few feet away in the trees. He heard them and he saw them, and he had heard and seen them before. He says he was tempted and then heard a voice telling him to put a stop to it. So he ran down there, and drunken Billy Rabb tried to stop him, but Herald hit Billy and broke the bottle and used it on April."

Pale faces looked up and now no one seemed to want to say anything. Dim colors clung to the interior stones. A beam of sunshine was slanting through one of the stained-glass windows, and the cool stones were tinged with purple and saffron and rose.

"Then Herald was afraid and alone, the way he's always been. He panicked. He wanted to hide

her somewhere, so he carried her here because he always felt safe and belonged here. He was desperate, and he carried her along the gravel around the cemetery wall where he left no tracks or marks. But he left the heel of one of April's shoes at the door. He doesn't remember carrying it up here. But he must have, because both slippers were found at the scene of the accident."

"Accident?" said Reverend Schlagg in a very low voice.

"Herald didn't plan to do it," Wyatt said. "Doesn't even know why he did it. Any more than he knows why he brought her here to hide her. Or why he hid her, but left her clothes lying around. It just happened, like all accidents happen, like getting born happened to him."

Wyatt walked back down the stairs and started up the aisle to leave the church.

"Wait," Giles said. "What are we going to do?"

"Get her out and find another

organist," Wyatt said brusquely.

"Where's Herald?" asked Reverend Schlagg.

"Over in the rectory," Wyatt said. "Praying."

"Where you going?" Hogan yelled.

"Fishing," Wyatt said. "Perch and bullheads."

"Which one?" Giles called down hoarsely.

"The ones just to your right," Wyatt said. "That's the reason he wouldn't play the organ today."

They watched him walk up the aisle and appear briefly brightened by a beam of sunshine that slanted through stained glass and made a small rainbow across his back. Then he went out and shut the door, and they were watching only motes of dust that were lightly afloat in the vaulted air, passing through the sunbeam and becoming flecks of fading silver.

Then, after a while, Hogan and Giles forced themselves to move over and reach down behind the pipes of the organ.



# THE STATION



**I**T HAPPENED in the evening rush. I was on the road, covering the intersection, and I'd just given a short whistle blast to a citizen trying to beat the light, so my eyes were at curb level.

The scream came right in the middle of the three-second dead stop, before the walk light let pedestrians spill off the curb like horses out of a starting gate.

I wheeled. She was right behind me, brown suit, feathered hat, and her lipstick-red mouth wide open for another yell. But she was two feet from anybody, and her purse still hung on its strap.

Then she pointed.

*Is it possible there's a "heart" in this traffic cop who rashly defies death at dizzy heights to save a human fly when he wonders if the man is really worth the risk?*



The man was spread-eagled against the side of the building on the opposite corner, six floors up and working his way along the ledge.

That's the top floor. The ledge runs along two sides of the building, and a cornice overhangs at roof level. The ledge-crawler was on the State Street side, inching his way toward the alley end of the building. The ledge stops at the alley.

Traffic moved, but on my corner the citizens were planted, watching as the ledge-walker's right hand came around in front and stuck a gun in his belt. Then the hand moved back, pawing for the wall. Suddenly he froze, spread against the wall, looking up.

Somebody behind me said "Ah-h-h!" from belly depth.

I gave a long whistle blast that stalled the double lines of cars charging the intersection, and sprinted between them toward the building entrance.

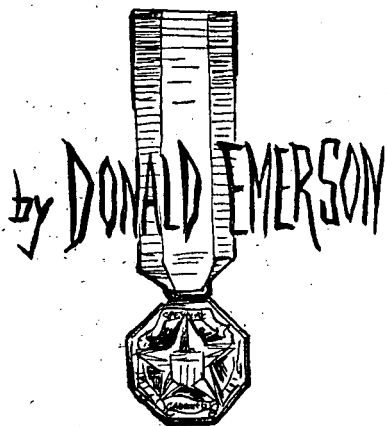
A grandfather in faded uniform was sitting on a stool inside the elevator, reading the sports. I

knocked the door latch loose and pulled the lever over before he got the sheet away from his red-rimmed eyes.

"Police emergency," I said. "Get to a phone and tell 'em where."

I filled in the details as the car rattled upward. I wasn't sure whether his shakes came from age or anxiety. Maybe it was the antique cage.

There was a long interval for thought on the way up. Like how I could coax the goofball back inside and save him from a sloppy end. Like how I could make the human fly bit pay off.



I've been three times up for transfer with a high test score and three times screwed by Kaminski. He figures I ratted on his cousin Stanislaus when Stanny got his suspension. I didn't, but Kaminski can block me for another year unless I get a citation. Conspicuous gallantry, they call it. If you live, it gives you enough points to shake a sergeant off your back.

I'd crawl the ledge myself for that.

Then somewhere around the fourth floor I thought of Ann and Tommy. They learn fast what it's like to wait. Some night when you have a flat on the way home you come in and hear the kid saying, "Where's Daddy?" and find your wife twisting the dials for a news flash. You know from the way she holds you what she's been thinking, and you know it again in bed. Maybe that night you don't wake up, but some night you do, and you find her staring at the ceiling.

I was fifteen minutes from relief, and no matter what happened they'd have a wait tonight. If it was long enough, they could catch it on TV.

I didn't want that. Since Tommy's been kept in the house he dogs Ann's footsteps. He'd be there, watching. He hasn't been out alone since the Berger kid was picked up in the alley three doors

away and cut up somewhere between there and the ditch where they found him two days later.

I was out on six while Grandpa was still trying to level the car. His buzzer was chattering, and I heard boots pounding up as I passed the stairs.

I didn't have to guess which door. The glass panel said "H. Smith, Specialties." I kicked it the rest of the way open.

Allison was on the floor. He was still covering the door to the inner office, but a bored look was coming into his eyes.

"I can pick him off," I said.

His head wobbled. "Take him," I think he said. "The Berger . . ."

He was losing interest fast, but I didn't need the background. Allison is Vice Squad, so he'd have been checking the deviate list since the first flash on the Berger kid. He must have had something to lead him to H. Smith, besides the list.

The window square was changing from weak daylight to the flicker of display signs as I edged over from the side. It was training made me do that. I didn't expect action from H. Smith.

I could tell about where he was from the faces of the ghouls down on the street. They were all focussed on him, all waiting.

I swung up on the sill for a

quick view. He was still spread against the wall. As boots pounded down the corridor I swung both feet out and felt for the ledge. H. Smith was mine.

Then I looked down.

They hadn't blocked the street yet, and cars were still moving. That's all I saw, because I froze with a knuckle-busting grip to the window frame over my head.

It was maybe ten seconds before my foot found the ledge and I relaxed my arm enough to stand up slowly outside the window, but it felt like a long, long time and the world shrank to a few inches of ledge and a wall behind me. I focussed on Smith to keep from seeing anything else.

The wall was artificial stone, smooth enough so my shoulders could slide against it. My fingers registered each block, and my feet shuffled sideways without ever losing touch.

Light flashed on in the room I had left.

"Densher!"

I knew the voice: Kaminski. He could have been cruising the area, reading the regulations and watching for another excuse for an entry on my rating sheet.

Smith heard him, too, and his head pivoted slowly like a kid's toy, as though he were afraid he'd lose balance if he moved fast. It was

the face of a man completely bugged out, open-mouthed and dull-eyed, gone flabby like meat. He was about to my shoulder, and pudgy. His suit coat flapped open.

"Wait till they get a line on you," Kaminski said. I heard him drag a chair to the window, then his head was close to mine. "He's a cop-killer, Densher. There's a citation for you if you bring him in."

Allison . . .

A kid-killer, I thought, but I said, "You've seen him. He'll never burn."

I could hear Kaminski's breath. "I want to take him in. He'll wish he could."

A flash bulb exploded in a window across the street and I jerked.

"Make that fool stop!" I said to Kaminski as the spot in my eyes faded.

When the spot dimmed out I saw Smith again. He looked as though he'd sagged. I thought it was the light from the marquee below until I focussed. He was twitching.

When Smith chose the ledge he maybe thought he could break back in and get around Allison. He must have been too stiff with fear to try it, even before I hit the ledge.

Another flash went off, but I had my face away. I heard a long "Ah!" from the street, like a crowd

at the fireworks on the Fourth."

Sirens were closing in. A little more and the police floodlights and the television cameras would be out, and Ann and Tommy could sit on our new foam rubber davenport holding on to each other, too scared to cry.

I wanted to end it.

"Wait for the line, Densher!" Kaminski ordered. "Sieppel, where the hell is it?"

A high scream from below cut my attention off, Kaminski. Smith was moving, and I thought again of the kid's toy going through its mechanical cycle. One foot, other foot, inches at a time, and the hands sliding along.

He looked as if he'd push into space at the alley end of the ledge without knowing what he was doing.

I didn't wait for the line.

I started talking like a record with a stuck needle, flat voice, steady pitch, and the same phrases over and over.

"Stop moving, Smith. Stop moving. I'll get you back. Come back, Smith. I'll get you back." Over and over in the same monotone while I gained on him.

He stopped, and I stopped. I kept on talking.

I was playing my own record while I mouthed the words. My personal sound track said, "There's

a citation, but he dropped Allison. Citation, but he cut up a kid. It could have been Tommy. There's a citation."

I was getting through to him. The eyes were seeing me for the first time. Me, personally. Another human being.

The flicker of lights was suddenly blanked out by a steady glow. The spot truck was down there now, but I knew better than to look.

Smith was etched in the cold glow, pudgy hands, slack mouth and all. But the eyes were alive now.

"Come back this way," I chanted. "I'll help you in. Come back, Smith."

He didn't move, but when I shuffled closer he didn't inch away. I was almost within reach now, but I didn't want to be close enough for him to grab. Not till I had a line around me.

*It might have been Tommy.*

"Come back, Smith."

*There's a citation for you, Densher.*

Life was spreading out from the eyes. The mouth was tightening. But when he spoke, the voice was still dead. "They'll kill me."

"They'll help you, Smith. You need help. I'll help you."

The eyes wanted to believe me. "They'll kill me."



He was almost whispering, but the sirens were dead now and I could hear it all.

"You're sick, Smith. They'll cure you."

The hooded look came back to the eyes. "They tried."

His hands had been spread against the wall, but now they slid down beside him. He was like the kid's toy run down, ready to topple if the wind stirred.

I could feel my innards moving. Without forgetting Allison or the Berger kid or Tommy I could remember last Sunday's voice from the pulpit intoning, "Now are we the sons of . . ."

I believed it then, and I believed it now.

*Allison; the Berger kid; maybe Tommy.* I knew all the crap about restoring a man to society, and I'd seen what this one did to Joe Berger, who played with my kid up to last Wednesday.

*It might have been Tommy.*

Somebody said, "Here's the line, Densher." Without looking, I felt the hand threading the web harness around me. Another cop, but he was as gentle as if he were tucking covers around a sleeping kid. Then he cinched the harness tight and said, "Spill him off."

I knew that voice, too. Harkness. He'd covered me once when I went into a blind alley after a crazy

hophead who had a stolen Luger.

I could move closer now. Slowly; steadily. Not fast enough to startle Smith. Talking again as I moved.

I put out my hand and touched his arm. Not to grab him, just to make contact. He twitched. I kept my hand above his arm so he couldn't grab me. I kept on talking.

The hard light from the spot truck cut up in his face from an angle, and the ledge threw a shadow up to our knees. I moved my foot closer, sliding it along the ledge toward his.

"We'll go back, Smith. You'll go to the hospital. It's almost over."

I tightened my fingers over his wrist and began drawing him toward me. His arm followed me, then he slid toward me a couple of inches. Another flash bulb popped from across the way, but in the steady glow of the spot it didn't matter now.

I could see the half-page spread in the *Post* and the *Tribune* and the two-column cut in *Time*. Maybe a sequence in *Life* if the boys across the way were free-lancing. I could write the citation.

I talked him back toward the window, gradually tightening my grip on his arm. Our feet made contact, and I led him by touch. Like dancing. He fell into the

rhythm I set up with my foot for our sidewise shuffle.

He looked almost human now. A breathing toy, gulping his air in short, panting breaths.

"You killed a cop," I said out of the side of my mouth.

He kept on moving, but his mouth twitched sideways.

"You cut up Joe Berger."

Only the pull on his arm kept him moving. He looked like the toy again, but still moving, his weight back on his heels and his shoulders against the wall.

My free hand found the window opening, and a pair of hands tightened on my arm like set screws. I felt a steady pull against the belt. I inched my foot up against the wall so Smith could move closer.

His face was a foot away and I said, "Where's the knife?" It wasn't the phonograph voice any more, but still low. Just between Smith and me.

His eyes bugged out as though he'd been snapped from a trance, and I felt the shudder go through him. "The ditch. It's in . . ."

*It could have been our Tommy.*

My foot was behind his now, and all I had to do was bear down to spill him off the ledge. His own scream would follow him down until it was cut off by the solid, final, unechoing thud. Then the flash bulbs would pick out the pile of meat on the sidewalk.

I took him in.

There was a lot a jazz before Lieutenant Grove detailed Harkness to get me home. On the way, I stopped at the phone in the lobby.

"I'll be late," I told Ann. "I'm all right. You can let Tommy play in the yard."

She drew breath. "Are you crazy, Pete? It's night!"

Suddenly I was angry. "He can play outside if he wants!"

I was getting out at my place when Harkness said, "That poor slob is really gone. He'll never stand trial."

I looked at the house where my wife and kid were waiting. "He stood trial," I said as I slammed the door.

I was thinking about the citation.



**A**LL the trouble with Fred Beasley started the day old Molly Ratliff dragged me out of the poolroom. I'd just run a string of eight balls and I was real upset with Molly for spoiling the best run I'd had in fourteen years. Anyway, old Molly is real excited and so I go outside with her.

"Sheriff, it's that Fred Beasley. I always said he was no good. Now

he's gone and done it. I kept telling you he was no good and for you to keep your eye on him, but oh no, you have to spend your time shooting pool with all of those



**FRED'S**

**DIGGIN'S**



*By Jack Lemmon*

*Mix a nosy neighbor, an uninhibited Sheriff, and a clever murder ruse with some cold, incalculable facts and you meet a human impasse such as Fred Beasley.*

FRED'S DIGGIN'S

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good-for-nothing loafers. I knew that some day he'd do it. I just knew it."

When she stopped for breath I said, "Now just hold on here a minute, Molly. What has Fred gone and done while I was shooting pool with those good-for-nothing loafers?"

"Why he's gone and murdered his wife, Cora, God rest her soul. And such a sweet woman she was too. Why she ever put up with that no good Fred Beasley, I'll never know."

Tell the truth, I didn't much care for old Molly talking that way about Fred. In my book Fred was a pretty good old boy. Oh, he was a little odd in some ways. Like he seemed to like fishing more than shooting pool with the boys, but that's no reason to condemn him. Then too, he couldn't abide old Molly's gossip. Seein's they lived next door to each other, that made for kinda strained relations. Personally, I felt that if Fred was agoin' to kill anybody, it would have been Molly.

"Molly," I said, "That's a right serious charge to make against Fred. I reckon you got some proof?"

Molly looks like the cat that swallowed the canary and says, "All the proof in the world. He buried her right in his side yard,

next to my parlor window. Can't ask for no more proof than that."

"You see him bury her?" I asked.

"Well, I didn't actually see her body, if that's what you mean. But I heard him working on the grave late last night. Must have been after midnight. This morning, there it was. A freshly covered grave right there in his side yard next to my parlor window."

The back of my neck needed scratching and that gave me a minute to think of how to handle the situation. "Well, a grave don't constitute proof in a murder case Molly. We have to have a corpus delicti you know. And even if we do get us a body, we have to prove that a murder was committed."

"Oh don't be so technical with me, Sheriff. I don't know anything about corpus delictuses, or whatever they are, all I know is that Fred Beasley murdered poor Cora and you'd better do something about it."

"I'll tell you what, Molly. Soon's I finish my game, I'll amble over to Fred's and have a little talk with him."

For some reason or other, this seems to upset Molly a mite. She always was the impatient type anyway. "Sheriff," she says, "You'd better get over there and arrest Fred right now before he takes it on the lam."

"Takes it on the lam?" I say. "You've been reading them detective stories, haven't you?"

"What I read is no business of yours. I'm simply trying to talk to you in language that you understand, or would understand if you were any kind of a sheriff."

She's gettin' sort of hot under the collar and I figure I might as well pacify her a little. "OK, Molly, I'll get right down there. The boys have probably racked 'em up and started a new game anyway."

I leave Molly to spread the word all over town, as I know she will, and I head for Fred's house. Fred's sittin' on the front steps untangling a fishin' line, when I get there.

"Mornin' Fred," I say.

"Mornin' Sheriff. Come on up and set a spell. You out huntin' dangerous criminals this mornin'? Or do you have time for a cup of coffee?"

"Well I tell you, Fred. I'm here on kind of semi-official business."

Quick as a wink Fred says, "I don't even own no semi, Sheriff. You're wastin' your time with me." Fred's always been quick with fast comebacks like that.

I give him a minute to enjoy his little joke, and then I get right down to business. "Fred, I ran into Molly a little bit ago. She seemed to be a mite upset about some dig-

gin' in your side yard. She has some silly notion about it and I thought I'd come over and find out what it's all about."

Fred kind of shrugs his shoulders and says, "Ain't nothin' to find out about Sheriff. I just decided to spade me up a little patch of side yard last night. Anything wrong in that?"

"Well, I guess there ain't nothin' wrong in spading up a little patch of side yard, if that's all you did."

"Sure, Sheriff, that's all I did. Mosey around the side there and take a look for yourself."

That seemed like a pretty good idea to me and so I drifted on around to the side yard. I have to admit, Molly's description was pretty accurate. It sure looked like a grave. About the same dimensions as the average grave and all covered over with a mound of fresh dirt. I noticed that Fred had transplanted a couple of geranium plants too. The whole set-up looked as much like a grave as anything we got out in the cemetery. Only thing missin' was a headstone. Matter of fact, the whole thing looked too much like a grave. I couldn't figure a fella killin' his wife and then goin' to the trouble of making it so obvious. By this time Fred had joined me in the side yard.

"Looks kind of pretty there,

don't it, Sheriff?" he says proudly.

"Well, I reckon it's up to each man to decide how he wants to pretty his yard up."

Fred looks me straight in the eye and says, "I just sort of thought it broke up the monotony of all this grass."

I have a feeling that I don't understand what's going on and I figure I'd better head back to the poolroom where I can think. Before I go, I ask Fred one more question which I figure might have some bearing on the situation.

"How's Cora feelin' these days Fred?"

"I guess she's all right, Sheriff," he says.

"You *guess* she's all right, Fred? Don't you know?"

"Not exactly, Sheriff. You see, last night her sister from the West Coast came by and she left with her for a little vacation trip." He says this as nonchalantly as you please.

"Sounds kind of sudden, Fred. How long's she going to be gone?"

"I don't rightly know, Sheriff. Could be for a long time."

"I never heard Cora tell of a sister," I say. "You sure she went off with a sister?"

"Oh for Pete's sakes, Sheriff. Stop asking me these idiotic questions. I got some important fishing

to do anyway. I'll see you later." With that he walks off and I'm left looking at the grave.

About this time Jim Mosely comes strolling down the street with the mail. I figure that it's my duty to gather all the information I can about this thing and so I stop him.

"Jim, this here is official business. I have to ask you a couple of questions."

Jim looks a trifle bored, the way he always does, and says "I figured you must be on official business. Must be pretty serious to get you out of the pool hall this time of day."

"Now Jim, what I want to ask is, do you remember the Beaslys' ever gettin' any mail from a sister of Cora's on the West Coast?"

"Can't tell you, Sheriff. Postal employees are not allowed to discuss the nature of mail received by patrons of the Postal Service."

"How come I see you passing the pool hall every morning reading postcards?"

"Sheriff, that is an entirely different matter. If you desire knowledge of mail received by specific persons, I would suggest you take it up with the Postmaster General in Washington."

"Now look here, Jim. If you don't want to cooperate with an official investigation by the Sher-

iff's Office of this County, it's up to you, but there's no reason to get uppity with me."

"Just followin' my orders, Sheriff." With that he goes off down the street readin' a post card and I'm thinkin' I wish the Postmaster General could see him now.

Back at the pool hall, I put together the information I have. When I add it up, between shots, I realize it ain't much. Seems like Fred spaded up a part of his side lawn, Cora went out of town unexpectedly and I got Fred and Jim upset with me. Not much to show for a mornin's work.

That afternoon I'm moseying along Main Street when Molly grabs me again. I saw her comin' but it was too late to dodge and she cornered me.

"Well, Sheriff, have you got that Mad Dog Killer in jail yet?"

"Now look here, Molly, you got no license to call Fred Beasley a 'Mad Dog Killer'. You could get in trouble talkin' that way about a man. He could sue you for libel or slander or defamein' his character, or sumpin'."

"Sheriff, you make me sick. Why we elect a namby-pamby sheriff like you is beyond me. I believe you'd be afraid to face up to your shadow. What we need in a case like this is fearless lawmen who aren't afraid to face down a vicious

killer." Molly continued to sputter.

"Calm down a little, Molly," I say. "Fred says that Cora left on a vacation with her sister. I don't see any evidence that a crime's been committed. Just because a man spades up his side yard is no reason to call him a 'Mad Dog Killer'."

"Just the same I think he ought to be in jail and I'm not going to rest until I see him there," Molly says and stalks off.

Knowin' Molly like I do, I know there's not much chance of her restin'. Not while there's a chance of her passin' on a juicy piece of gossip like she figures she has now.

The next morning Molly drags me out of the poolroom again. This makes two days in a row and I'm gettin' a little tired of the whole thing. This time she's got one of them lurid type detective magazines in her hand.

"Well, I guess you'll listen now, Sheriff. Just you read this story. It's almost the same identical thing as the Beasley Case. Just you read it."

"The Beasley Case? Oh come on, Molly. There's no Beasley Case. I'll read the story though if it'll make you feel any better."

"You just read it, Sheriff, and then arrest that 'Mad Dog Killer'."

"I'll read it, Molly. Thanks for the magazine."

"I want the magazine back, Sheriff. I'm just loaning it to you so's you'll see your duty a little plainer."

I took the magazine and told Molly I'd give it back to her later. The story she wanted me to read was about some guy who killed his wife and buried her in his yard. There was a slight difference though. This guy didn't go around advertising it by making a well-marked grave right out in his side yard. I gave the magazine to a kid and told him to take it over to Molly. Then I went back in the pool hall and lost thirty-five cents. That'll give you some idea of how upsettin' the whole thing was gettin' to be.

When I'm dragged out of the pool hall for the third straight morning, I'm really mad. I even think about resigning as Sheriff. When a job starts to interfere with a man's social life it's time he gave it some serious thought. This time it was Lawyer Rudy Parsons who dragged me out.

"Sheriff," he says. "Molly dropped in to see me this morning about the Beasley Case. She's pretty excited about it. Think we ought to do something."

"Well I'll tell you, Rudy. The way I figure it is that what we ought to do is forget all about it. I 'spect Cora Beasley will be acomin' home one of these days and that'll be that."

Rudy don't take too kindly to my idea. I can see what's botherin' him. He's been District Attorney for three years now and he hasn't had a chance to try a case for the County. He's champin' at the bit and practically drooling with the ideas of a real murder case.

"Sheriff, I'll tell you what. I'll wait a few more days and then if Cora isn't home and Fred can't offer some proof as to her whereabouts, I'm going to take action."

"Well I guess that's your right as D.A. I'll make it a point to talk to Fred in the next couple of days and let you know what he says. I'd go easy on the thing though. You know how Fred is. He don't take kindly to folks pryin' into his business."

Rudy allows as to how he'll wait another three days before he does anything and we let it go at that. For the next three days I'm way off my game, and the Beasley Case, as Molly calls it, costs me over two dollars in the pool hall.

On the third day I amble on over to Fred's to have a little chat. Fred starts out real friendly like and we talk for a while about fishin' and a couple of other important things. Finally I get down to business and ask Fred about Cora.

He gets real uppity and says,



"Sheriff, I know what that old biddy next door has been saying and I don't like it. It's none of her business, or anyone else's. What Cora and I do is no one's business but ours. I told you once that Cora was out of town with her sister and that's all I'm going to tell you."

"Fred, just answer me one question. Who's in that grave out in the side yard?"

"First off, Sheriff, who said it was a grave? I didn't. I said that I'd just spaded up a piece of the side yard to break the monotony of all that grass. That's all I'm going to say. If you want to arrest me, go ahead. I warn you though I'll sue for false arrest."

Well that about ended the conversation and I walked on back to report to Rudy. I told Rudy what Fred had had to say. Rudy gets pretty excited and says that he thinks Fred is acting in a mighty guilty way. I tried to calm him some, but couldn't do much good. Rudy said he'd figure out what he was going to do and let me know tomorrow.

I was a little surprised when I wasn't dragged out of the pool hall the next morning. I figured maybe Fred had decided to drop the whole thing. The idea made me so happy, I took four games straight from the boys.

Long about noon Rudy finds me

in the restaurant. One look and I can tell he's excited about something. He's pretty secretive about it and makes me come outside before he'll tell me what he's up to. Even then he talks real low and makes sure no one else can hear.

"Sheriff," he says. "I got a court order here which authorizes you to dig up that there grave in Fred Beasley's yard. Get a couple of deputies together and we'll get to it this afternoon."

"Now just a minute here, Rudy. Fred isn't going to like this one little bit. I told you he's kind of touchy about people meddlin' in what he thinks is his own personal business."

"I can't help what he likes," he snaps, "I've got a court order to dig that grave up and that's just what we're going to do. You get the deputies together, bring some shovels and meet me at my office."

I try and talk him out of it, but I can't do no good. I can see he's goin' to get that grave dug up, no matter what. I explained that I'd have to deputize a couple of the boys after lunch and we'd be at his place as soon as we could make it. He was pretty impatient but said he'd wait for us and to make it as fast as possible.

I had a little trouble finding a couple of guys to deputize. They all want to be deputies until they

find out it involves digging. Finally I found two guys in the tavern that wanted to pick up the three bucks the county would pay. We got 'hold of a couple of shovels and went on over to Rudy's. Rudy wanted me to drive us over to Fred's in the Sheriff's car but I explained that the car hadn't been running for three months. Rudy was a little put out about it but decided that we might as well walk over. Before we left his office, he called Bill Troop, the undertaker, and asked him to stand-by with the hearse. I thought this was going a little too far but Rudy was sure we'd find Cora down in that grave.

Fred was fit to be tied when Rudy told him what we were there for. He screamed and yelled about suing the county and carried on considerable. Rudy just showed him the court order and told us to get to work.

The boys started to dig and pretty soon I noticed quite a crowd had gathered. I kept all the people off of Fred's property and the boys kept digging. When they got down about three feet, I figured they weren't going to find anything. Rudy wouldn't let 'em quit though. He was sure they were goin' to come to something pretty soon. Molly was leaning out of her window making nasty remarks about

wife killers and the like, and the hearse was parked in Fred's drive.

We were down about four feet when a fella came by selling ice cream bars. We took a break and were all standing around eating ice cream when a car pulled up out front.

About six ice cream bars hit the ground as Cora Beasley got out of the car, walked across the yard just as alive as could be and gave Fred a big kiss.

"What in the world is going on here, Fred?" she said. "Did the roots get into the sewer again?"

Fred looked right at Rudy and said, "Let's go into the house, Cora. I want to hear all about your trip, then I'll explain what these baboons are doing."

Rudy looks like he might drop dead any minute. He turns the color of a vine ripened tomato and says, "All right you men. Get that hole covered up as quickly as possible." With that he stalks off up the street.

I tell the guy driving the hearse to get going, Molly pulls her head back in her window and the crowd starts to break up. It takes us about ten minutes to get the hole all covered up and then we leave too.

Two days later Rudy looks like he might drop dead again. Fred has filed a \$10,000 damage suit against the county and against

Rudy. He claims all kinds of things like invasion of privacy, unjust seizure and search, public embarrassment and defamation of character. Rudy says that since there's nothing else on the court calendar, the case will come up for trial next week.

Just about the whole town was in the courtroom for the trial. Most of the people were a little disappointed because there wasn't any real good gossip brought out. The trial only lasted about two hours. Fred had got himself a real sharp young lawyer from over to Carlinsville. He kind of laid it right on the line in a nice quiet way and you could tell the boys in the jury were mighty impressed. Rudy ranted and raved considerable and even I could see the boys were kind of bored. The jury was out about twenty minutes and then they brought in a verdict for Fred. They figured the county should pay Fred five hundred dollars and Rudy had to pay Fred one hundred dollars.

The judge gave Rudy a real talking to. I never heard a man so dressed down in public. I figured that would hold Rudy for some time. I guess the judge figured the same thing and that's why he did it. Everybody in town was pretty upset about Rudy. They all figured he'd cost the county a good piece

of change. Rudy made himself pretty scarce for the next couple of weeks and even Molly cut down on her gossiping.

I could tell that both Rudy and Molly were pretty rankled by the thing. They were both looking for a chance to get even with Fred. Their chance came about six months later.

It was Rudy who brought the story to me this time. Seemed that Fred was at it again. Another grave dug late at night in the side yard. This time it was a mite different though. Molly had heard a shot about midnight and then heard Fred digging the grave later. Rudy had checked and a couple of other neighbors had heard the shot too. Fred refused to discuss the shot or to say where Cora was. She'd disappeared again.

I had to admit that the whole thing sounded mighty suspicious. Molly figured that Fred had done away with Cora for sure this time, figuring that neither Rudy or me would dare to dig up the yard again. Rudy and I talked about it for a while and then decided that we'd question Fred about the shot. We figured that if Fred had shot Cora in the house, there ought to be some evidence of it around.

Fred was his usual uncooperative self. All he would say was that it was none of our business what

he'd buried in the side yard. He said he'd shot a rat in the bedroom and that accounted for the noise. Rudy asked to see the bedroom and Fred obliged.

The bed was stripped down and even the mattress cover was gone. Rudy figured he'd stumbled onto something and asked Fred what had happened to the bed clothes and mattress cover.

Fred has an amused little smile on his face as he answers Rudy. "First off, I don't think it's any of your business. Second off, I'd of thought that you'd have learned how expensive it can be to be a nosey lawyer."

Rudy is beet red and says, "Fred, let me lay it on the line for you. I've got a hunch that the first deal you pulled was strictly cover-up. I think you figured to catch us on that first one, and then figured we'd be too leery to go ahead with any more investigations. Well, let me tell you one thing, Fred Beasley. I'm the officially elected and duly sworn D.A. of this county, and I aim to carry out my duties to the best of my abilities."

Fred looks him straight in the eye and says, "Don't be spouting off with that there campaign talk in my house. I'm not goin' to vote for you anyway."

Looks to me like Rudy might burst out in flames any second as

he says, "Fred, I'm not fooling around with you any more. I want to know what happened to the bed clothes from this bed. I also want an explanation for what looks like a bullet hole in that mattress and I want it now."

As cool as a cucumber Fred answers, "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. D. A. It's like I said. I shot a rat in here and it kinda messed up the bed so I burned the bed clothes. Now why don't you mince on back to your office and start prosecuting overtime parkers? That's where I think your real talents lie."

Rudy turns on his heel and stalks out of the room. He's makin' little sputterin' noises as he goes down the stairs two at a time and charges out of the house. I follow him, hearing Fred's laughter behind me.

Rudy strides up the street much faster than I'm used to movin' and it takes me two blocks to catch up with him. When I do catch him, he's still blusterin' and fumin' so much I can hardly make out what he's sayin'. The gist of it is that he's now convinced that Fred is hiding something. Shootin' the rat on the bed doesn't make much sense to Rudy and he's sure there's more to it than that. I try and calm him down some, but he's pretty het up. He figures that Fred's makin' a fool of him and he's not about

to stand for it. By the time we get back by the pool hall, he's calmed down a mite and says he'll wait a little before he does anything more.

Rudy drops by the pool hall every mornin' to find out if I know anything new. I don't because I'm not doin' anything about it. Every afternoon I see Molly goin' up to Rudy's office and she stays up there with Rudy for about an hour each day. I figure they're talkin' over the Beasley Case, as they refer to it. Every time Molly sees me she gives me her opinion of a sheriff who allows 'Mad Dog Killers' to run loose in town.

Two weeks go by and still Cora Beasley hasn't shown up. Molly's been spoutin' off all over town and some of the town folk are gettin' a mite excited about the whole thing. People start puttin' pressure on me to do something, but all I tell 'em is that I've got no solid indications that any crime has been committed.

Three weeks to the day that the shot was heard, the grave was dug, Cora Beasley disappeared, Rudy decides to act. He drags me out of the pool hall and shows me another court order.

I try and talk him out of it because I got a funny little feeling that somethin's wrong. The whole thing just doesn't add up in my

book. Rudy won't have any of it though. He's all excited and insists that we dig up the new grave right away.

I get the shovel boys together and we head down to Fred's place that afternoon. Molly's broadcast the news all over town and a big crowd gathers. Most businesses in town close up so's everybody can attend. Molly has a group of ladies in for tea and to watch the diggin' from her parlor window. I haven't seen so many people together since our centennial celebration back in '38.

I start the boys diggin' and we hit something down at the two-foot level. It's a badly decomposed corpse. Only thing is, it's the corpse of a rat with a bullet hole through it. I got a feelin' we've had it, but the boys keep right on diggin'. The hole gets deeper and deeper and by late afternoon it's down about seven feet. At this level, we hit a layer of almost rock-hard clay. It's plain to see that Fred couldn't of dug any deeper than this.

Rudy is white as a sheet as he tells us that we might as well call it a day. Call it a day we do and I wonder what the next move is. We fill the hole up and just as we're all leavin', I notice that smart young lawyer of Fred's goin' up to his house. This tells me what the next move is agoin' to be.

Well, I guess you can about figure what happened. Fred filed another suit. This time the judge was really steamin'. He hardly let Rudy say a word in his own defense. Everybody in town was really upset with Rudy. They sorta felt he was persecutin' Fred. It took the jury about four minutes to bring in the verdict. Like everybody knowed, Fred got a whoppin' big award. The jury assessed Rudy \$5,000 personally and the County \$20,000.

Fred was pretty good about it though. He said that as long as the County only had about \$7,000 in the treasury, he'd take that and let the County finance the rest over a period of a couple of years. He hinted around to Rudy that, if he resigned and left town, he'd forget about the \$5,000. Two days later Rudy left and the last we heard, he was workin' for the government in Washington. Reckon he figured he couldn't get into too much trouble there.

Cora Beasley showed up about a week after the trial as I figured she probably would. Things started

to calm down when a scandal came up about two months later, involvin' the preacher and a choir girl and the whole Fred Beasley Case was pretty well forgotten.

Things was pretty quiet for about five months, then folks started to talk again. Fred's next door neighbor, Molly, disappeared and a new grave appeared in Fred's side yard. There was plenty of talk, but of course there wasn't much anyone could do. Or maybe I should say, there wasn't much anyone dared to do. I wasn't about to get involved with Fred's new grave and neither was anyone else. None of us could afford to take the chance. The county was still payin' off to Fred and the new D.A. was Fred's smart young lawyer.

Nowadays when a few people get together a popular thing to talk about is whether Molly is lying out there in Fred's yard or not. Me? Well, to tell the truth, I just don't know. I don't suppose any of us will know, least as long as Fred's around to file one of them there damage suits.



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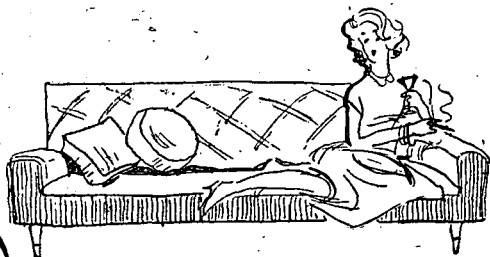
REMITTANCE MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER

THE POISON was already in the glass, its presence unsuspected, camouflaged by the strong brandy like a copperhead in a pile of fallen autumn leaves. Simon Kyle had only to drink, and he would be dead.

But for the moment he merely sipped. Still it was an important

test. Simon was a good judge of brandy. If he found the taste false, he was perfectly capable of throwing the stuff out and opening another bottle. But the brandy survived its trial. There was such a trifling amount of the foreign stuff in it. It was powerful though. Didn't I have Simon's own word

# The



for that?

"You're very pale this evening, Walter," he said.

"Am I? Well, maybe so. I've been a bit off my feed lately."

"Too bad. Why, you're sweating too."

"It is a bit hot in here, don't you think? Maybe this room is warm."

# Guilt of MURDER



*Sometimes it doesn't pay to risk one's future, one's health, and peace of mind for an inviting pair of green eyes, and a halo of innocence. It can be costly.*



"I hadn't noticed. Maybe it is."

Simon took another sip, contemplated the flavor. It wouldn't take much more actually. Even if he suspected something halfway through the glass, it would be too late by then.

I glanced across at Elise. She sat curled up there, slim and child-like in her little-girl dress. The dress matched the green of her eyes, her blonde hair was soft and fluffy, a halo of innocence. What would she have thought if she'd known what was transpiring? But she didn't know. There wasn't a single line of concern on the incredibly smooth skin of her beautiful face.

"Elise," Simon complained suddenly, "you're ignoring that martini. And Walter, I'm sure, tried so devotedly to make it just right for you."

Obediently she took a drink, almost a gulp, mechanically, like a puppet on a string.

"That's better," Simon approved. "Walter likes to do things for you, my dear. But he also likes to be appreciated. Don't you, Walter?"

I shrugged at the obvious sarcasm.

"You know," he went on, "if I hired my own special bartender, I couldn't get a better one than Walter. This brandy now—it's positively delicious."

"I didn't mix that, I just poured."

"Don't be modest, Walter. The hand of a good bartender can be noted even in the mere pouring of a drink. Ah, ambrosial!"

He took a third sip. Did he suspect anything? How could he?



I dared not turn to look at Elise.

"A good bartender," Simon was rambling on, "is even better when he himself appreciates good liquor. A real lush like yourself, Walter, could become a genius in the bartending trade. Why don't I set you up in your own little business? An intimate dark little bar specializing

in lovingly prepared drinks. Oh now, don't tell me that isn't your line, Walter. Don't tell me again you're really a poet languishing in my advertising department. We'll call this place simply, 'Walter's'. And we'll split the profits. And Elise—oh yes, Elise can decorate the place."

"What a joker you are, Simon." Elise's confusion was real. She was seldom if ever aware when Simon and I jabbed at each other.

Simon smiled. He was particularly ugly when he smiled. It was an ape's grin. His little black eyes became smaller, his bad teeth showed, his round face grew rounder.

"But I do have a sense of humor, you'll have to admit," he answered placidly. "Wouldn't I have to have that to endure you and Walter?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"My dear," Simon said without quite relinquishing his smile, "can you imagine that I'm so wrapped up in my work that I don't notice? You and Walter are . . . shall we say . . . fond of each other."

"Why, of course! Walter is my good friend."

What a little doll she was. She meant precisely what she told Simon, nothing more. There just wasn't anything more for her to admit. But Simon Kyle couldn't understand that. He had a dirty,

suspicious mind. He couldn't imagine innocence. He knew I was in love with Elise, he knew I adored her with a passion I finally hadn't been able to hide from him any longer. And he'd just naturally, because of that foul mind of his, concluded that my devotion had been returned. He couldn't comprehend simple little Elise any more than he could appreciate her.

"Yes, your good friend," Simon echoed. "Your special friend. Your inseparable companion for all the times when your husband is too busy to entertain you."

Yes, I hadn't moved any too soon. Simon was indeed in a dangerous mood if he was ready to mistreat Elise. I could see what he was intending. To extract some kind of admission from her, and then to turn it against me. To kick me out, or maybe something worse.

Only this time I was ahead of him. So I tried to remain calm. Simon's little thimble-sized brandy glass was not much more than half full now. Probably a lethal dose already, but with not much margin for error yet. I'd better be patient, let Simon have his say. It would be the last tirade of his to which we'd have to listen.

What a simple little plan it was. That was the best thing about it, its simplicity. Simon Kyle, drug and patent medicine magnate,

would shortly be dead by accident, but the accident would be the result of either his own carelessness or his own miscalculation.

Simon himself had set it up for me. Everybody who knew him knew about his little hobby, and could testify to it. For Simon Kyle's spare-time hobby was chemistry. Not chemistry in general, but chemistry very much in particular. The chemistry of poison.

He had a completely equipped laboratory for his playground, a huge room tucked away in the basement of this gingerbread castle. There were long white tables full of bottles, test tubes, retorts, intricate mazes of glass tubing, all the paraphernalia. And then the cages and cases of living things, the helpless creatures that were subjects of Simon's experiments.

He had a knack for it actually. People said he had made several important discoveries. He published his findings now and then, read papers at scientific conventions, had supposedly perfected an antidote for some sort of industrial poison with a long chemical name.

But the thing which had called attention to Simon Kyle as a poison researcher had been his well-publicized willingness to experiment upon himself. The rats and mice and guinea pigs were all right for certain purposes, and he slaugh-

tered hundreds of them. But when he really had to make the final determination about one of his little concoctions, he didn't mind at all sticking a needle in his own arm, or sniffing some deadly vapors, or tossing off a glassful of some vile liquid.

And there it was! The way to murder Simon was to poison him. The only real problem was to lure Simon into drinking something. Afterwards it would be very obvious to the police what had happened. Simon had used himself as a guinea pig, but had finally gone too far.

A martyr to science. It would be in all the papers. A few suspicious minds, when they saw pictures of Simon's beautiful widow, might wonder. Even a detective or two might wonder. But what could they *prove*? The facts would point to only one possible conclusion.

And right now, right at this moment, I almost had the job done. Simon had described this new substance he'd been playing with. Very deadly. I had sneaked some of it from his laboratory. I had measured, weighed it, even tasted it—kind of corrosive, metallic—and decided brandy would disguise it nicely. All that remained to do when Simon collapsed on the floor, would be to dispose of the brandy glass discreetly, and then

telephone for a doctor. Not too soon, of course. Simon had confided to me the time schedule on this poison. He'd be dead when the doctor arrived.

"Elise," he said in an increasingly nastier tone, "I'm talking to you."

"Yes, Simon." Poor, delicious little feather-brain, she sensed that an answer of some kind was required, but didn't know what.

"You've been seeing quite a lot of Walter, haven't you? Especially when I'm not around."

"You're never around, Simon." There was a moistness in her eyes now, and she was trying to blink it away. Simon couldn't understand this, but she was genuinely complaining of the lack of his company. In her simplicity, Elise was loyal to her bestial husband.

"Don't try to change the subject." He set the brandy glass down, still half full, and I tensed in agony. "Why don't you just admit it?"

"What, Simon?"

"That you're an unfaithful wife."

I don't think she really, fully comprehended the import of his accusation. Because she had never contemplated infidelity. But she glanced over at me, seeking an explanation. To Simon it must have seemed a glance of conspiracy, of guilt. He strode toward her.

"Stand up!" he commanded curtly.

She came to her feet instantly, never dreaming her husband's intention. It was I who foresaw his next action, but I was frozen in my chair. That was the measure of my fear of the man. I'd introduced a fatal dose of poison into his body, but while he still lived and breathed, I dared not withstand him openly.

So I merely sat there and watched him do it. I watched his heavy hand, the back of it black with hair, collide cruelly with Elise's pale cheek. And I saw the angry red mark it left.

"Simon!" Elise's whole body quivered like an arrow just arrived in its target and not quite come to rest. Then unable to bear the undeserved humiliation, she turned and ran from the room.

And I could not help thinking—it's just as well, to have her out of the room while Simon actually dies. I could tell her about it later, comfort her as she would undoubtedly need to be comforted.

But I was angry too, though maybe a bit late. And I had more courage somehow, confronting Simon alone, than when Elise was watching both of us. "You idiot!" I shouted at him.

He wheeled on me. "What was that?"

"I said you're a stupid idiot."

I don't know what, exactly, I expected, but I didn't expect him to look pleased. The ape-grin covered his whole face. "Is that the best you can do?" he taunted me. "Why didn't you defend her? Why didn't you do something while I was hitting her? But no, all you can do is call me names. So I'm an idiot, am I? Explain that to me, will you, Walter? Why am I an idiot?"

With supreme confidence that I wouldn't—couldn't—attack him, he turned away from me, walked back and sat down again in his chair. He picked up the neglected brandy glass, took another sip, and rolled his tongue around the inside of his mouth appreciatively. The sight of him imbibing his own destruction encouraged me.

"You're blind, Simon," I told him. "Oh, I love your wife all right. You're quite right there. I adore her. But what you don't see is that, little simpleton that she is, she's—well I wouldn't say that she loves you—but she's loyal."

"Really?" He was giving all his attention to the brandy.

"And she'll stay loyal as long as you're alive."

The way he jerked his head up and looked sharply at me, I knew that he had caught the implication in my words. And strangely then,

as he continued to study me, he took a long, meditative sip of brandy. The little glass was nearly empty.

"You don't have the nerve, Walter," he said finally.

"You were wrong about your wife," I told him, "and you're just as wrong about me." He could leave the rest of the brandy now, for all I cared. He'd had enough.

He was shaking his head. "You don't scare me in the least . . ."

"I don't have to. You're a dead man already, Simon."

He stopped, and his frown deepened. He'd found the answer. I looked at the brandy glass, and he followed my look.

"You've poisoned me?" He was calm. If I hadn't been confident, his calmness might have unnerved me. "There was something in the brandy?"

"That new stuff of yours. Your HN-33."

He was licking his lips, trying to recall a taste in the brandy.

"You're dead, Simon. You know how the stuff works. You've swallowed five grains."

"Which theoretically should be more than enough."

"I'm glad you approve my calculations. Since I'm not a chemist, I had to take your word for everything."

"I haven't finished the whole

glass. Four-fifths perhaps. I've probably swallowed only four grains." He set the glass down carefully.

"Still plenty."

"Do you think you can get away with this, Walter?"

Now I could smile. "Everybody knows you experiment on yourself, Simon. You've already taken minute doses. Now, you've simply made a mistake. Either careless or foolhardy, it doesn't matter which. The important thing is, Simon Kyle is dying by his own hand, not mine."

"Is my wife in on this plot, may I ask?"

"You idiot."

"Answer me."

"No, she knows nothing about it. I told you she was loyal."

"Then what do you stand to gain by murdering me?"

"She'll be relieved from her burden of loyalty when you're dead, Simon. She's a simple little creature. That's why complicated, devious people like you and me both love her, Simon. But with you out of the way, she'll be able to transfer her affections to me. You've already noticed that she's fond of me. It won't be hard. Who else does she have to turn to? Elise is not a woman who can exist alone and independent. And I will enjoy your money too, Simon."

"That's the real reason I expect."

"Only half the reason. I also love your wife. Or should I say, your widow."

"Not yet."

"Almost."

"Only four grains. Not five."

I experienced just the slightest chill of doubt then. The HN-33 was a quick-acting poison, but Simon was showing no symptoms, no evidence of pain. He was sitting very still now. Movement, of course would speed circulation and the action of the poison. He was fighting.

"You're a treacherous, ungrateful scum," he said, "but you've got nerve."

"Thank you."

"And you're clever, up to a point."

"Yes."

"But you're not very scientific. I've been dosing myself with HN-33 for months now. By all odds, I should have developed a tolerance. Do you know what that means—tolerance? I can take a lot more than the ordinary man. And I've swallowed only four grains, not five."

I felt the sweat oozing out of my pores, on my forehead and the palms of my hands. But my mouth was dry.

"And you're not man enough, Walter, to pour that last drop of

brandy down my throat or are you?"

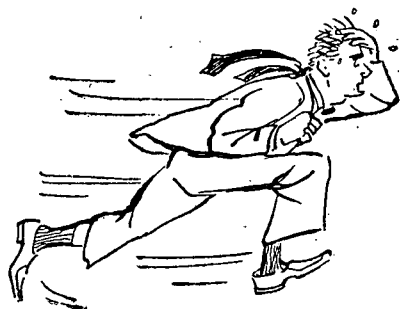
I wasn't going to try.

"And another thing . . ."

Something else too? He was bluffing, stalling for time, desperately but hopelessly. The stuff was in his stomach.

"I've achieved some little notoriety, Walter, by grandstanding as a dedicated, selfless man of science. Experimenting on myself, and all that. But do you imagine I haven't taken precautions? All this time that I've been playing around with HN-33, at any moment I could have developed symptoms. But I've always been prepared for the emergency. For every poison, Walter . . . there's an antidote."

Before I could move he'd fished the object—it looked like a tiny white tablet—out of his pocket and had sucked it into his mouth. I sprang on him, and the chair he'd been sitting in went over backwards under us.



But it was a brief struggle. As long as he was alive and breathing, I was no match for Simon. While we rolled on the floor, that enormous hairy paw of his managed to draw back. Though I knew it was coming, I couldn't avoid it. It smashed into my face, and my mouth was filled with blood and pain.

He didn't bother to hit me again. When he stood up, I crawled away from him, grabbed a chair, and hauled myself to my knees. From that position I looked at Simon Kyle through a red mist of rage and failure.

I looked at that simian countenance, at that vicious, terrifying grin. "Well, sonny boy," he said, "it's my turn now."

I don't know how I succeeded in escaping from that house. I don't know whether Simon actually chased me, or whether he didn't feel too well at that moment and was confident I couldn't go far anyway. But I fled the vengeance of Simon Kyle, and I didn't stop for a long, long time.

A rich man is a powerful man. He's outside, above the law. He can make his own law, and he can enforce it. Because he can buy the enforcers.

I knew somehow that Simon

Kyle would not inform the police. That would require his proving attempted murder, and he might have a difficult time doing that. Besides, the punishment meted out by the law wouldn't be enough to satisfy Simon. He'd prefer to be his own judge, his own jury, and his own hangman.

I kept moving. First the little border town, then over the border and a gradual retreat to the south. Then finally the ship, and even stranger places.

But there were always shadows. They were everywhere, in every street, in every alley, behind tree trunks and skulking in bushes, in restaurants and bars, even in cheap, tiny, vermin-infested hotel rooms with the shades pulled and a chair propped under the door knob. No face was to be trusted. Every coat pocket concealed a gun, every sleeve a knife.

Until one day I discovered that I didn't have to run any longer. It was the day in that African hospital when the doctors decided that the necessary first step in curing my infestation of lice was to shave off my beard. I protested, and the process was painful, but it happened.

The man I saw in the mirror then wasn't me. Five years of running had worked changes. There was the whitened, thinning hair,

and there were the sunken eyes. There were the marks that malnutrition and dysentery and smallpox had left. And not the least was the smashed and broken nose that put the whole face awry. I was safe from recognition.

Within a month I was on another ship. Within two months I was back in Simon Kyle's town. Why? The reason sounds preposterous. I wanted to see Elise. Just a glimpse. The woman I had gambled everything to win, and had failed. Yes, preposterous, but after five years of misery I deserved this small boon.

The gingerbread castle was the same. Remote at the end of its long driveway, almost hidden among its trees and shrubbery, fresh in their new spring green. I knew enough not to march up to the front door. Simon might answer my bell. And though he would not know who I was, I didn't want to see him. I wanted only to see Elise.

For two days I skulked about the rear premises, risking arrest as a trespasser, a loiterer. I knew that cars came and went in the front drive, but I wanted to catch Elise alone.

It was on the third day that she came out into the garden. I nearly fainted from the shock of actually seeing her after five years of only



imagining her. She was—if that were possible—more beautiful than ever, her skin as glowing, her hair as golden and glorious, her eyes as radiant, her whole face and figure resembling a goddess more than a woman.

I hadn't intended that she see me. I hadn't intended to speak to her. But the exclamation burst out from my hiding place in the shrubbery. "Elise!"

Then I had to step out. "Please don't be frightened," I begged her. "I'm not going to harm you."

But she may well have wondered. Yet the ragged scarecrow that I was surely must have appeared too frail to be dangerous. She paused, hesitated, than began to peer more closely at my face.

"Don't I know you?"

What did I hope to gain? Sympathy? I don't know. But foolishly I told her. "I'm Walter. I used to . . ."

"Walter?" She puzzled over this a moment. "Oh yes . . . Walter . . . I remember." She furrowed her classic brow, struggling with a thought. "Oh, yes . . . there's something I was supposed to give you."

She turned and ran back to the house so fast that I had no chance to stop her. Was she going to fetch Simon? No, she hadn't said that. And Elise would never try to trap

me. But I hid again, just in case Simon might follow her out. Fear and curiosity conflicted inside me.

But when she returned, she was alone, and she brought a small white envelope. She stopped a few steps away from me, and held the envelope out to me at arm's length. As if she didn't care for physical contact?

"Simon said I was to give this to you if you ever came back."

I accepted the envelope without touching her slim, beautiful fingers. It was sealed. I had difficulty in opening it. But when I finally managed it, a small piece of paper came out. I unfolded it and read.

"My dear old friend Walter: You've been gone for a long time, haven't you? I knew you would run. Because you're a coward. You almost fooled me for a moment when I found out you were attempting murder. But you were still a coward. You chose poison, which is a woman's way to commit murder. And you thought you were so safe. And then you were so terrified when failure stared you in the face. You thought I was going to chase you.

"It would have been a pleasure, Walter. No credit to you here. But it's simply that I'm a better chemist than I'd like to be right now. My HN-33 is a great piece of work. One can't build up a tolerance to

it. And there's no antidote. That 'antidote' you saw me swallow, by the way, was an aspirin I happened to have in my pocket.

"I've written a suicide note, Walter. It's to protect Elise. She is really innocent, as you insisted. But I'm too good a scientist for people to imagine that I made a mistake of some kind and swallowed too much HN-33. So I want to make absolutely sure some bumbling detective can't accuse Elise of murder.

"Of course it relieves you of legal guilt too, Walter. But you didn't know that, did you? You ran too fast, and too far. So you were out of touch. And you stayed away a long time. How long? Let me guess. Five years? Ten years? Wasted years, Walter. You could have had Elise all this time. And my money. Oh, Walter, those wasted years. And I'll wager this, it's too late now.

"I'm enjoying this. Much more than having you in prison. Because this way you made your own prison, out of your cowardice. Goodbye, Walter.

Your devoted friend, Simon."

I was trying to organize my thoughts. This wasn't over yet, this contest between Simon and me. It wasn't too late. Lots of good food and rest, hair dye, maybe even a toupee, a good cosmetician anyway, plastic surgery. Wasted years, yes, but by heaven, I could make up for them.

When I glanced up from the letter however, I saw a third person. He must have approached while I'd been reading. He was tall, young, very good-looking.

"This is my husband, Roger," Elise was saying.

And then I saw he was holding a pistol in his hand. I must have started and looked frightened, because Roger hastily put the thing into his pocket.

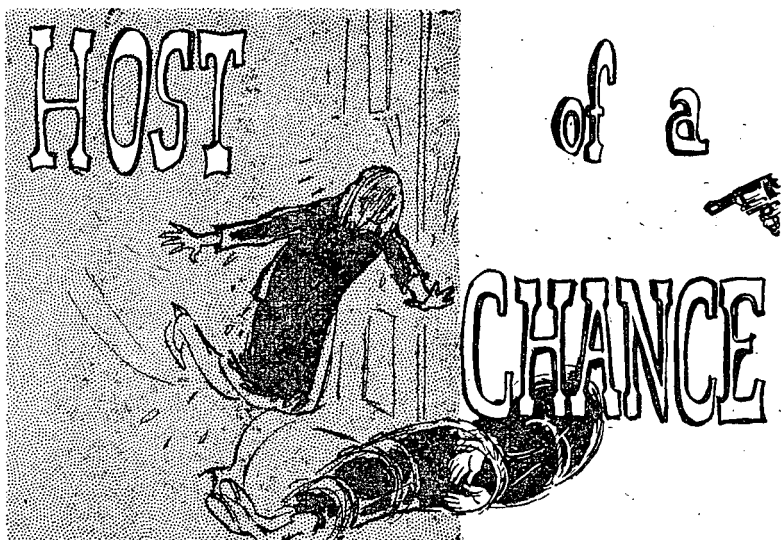
"Sorry, old chap," he said.

"Guns are Roger's hobby," Elise explained. "He's always carrying one around. And I wish he wouldn't. I'm always afraid there'll be an accident."

I smiled my toothless grin, and congratulated Roger, trying to cover my chagrin.

### **Every Friday**

*The new television show **ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS**, is one hour long, and will be seen on Friday evenings, at 9:30 PM EST, on the CBS network.*



**T**HE COUNTRYSIDE was dark and windswept, shrouded in the variegated grays of pelting rain. Along the highway the light-colored car moved like a bleached porpoise in the watery night, its nose tilted slightly upward, its rear end weighted down with luggage. The young woman behind the wheel leaned forward, peering through the rain-sluiced windshield. If this storm didn't let up she'd never get home tonight. Evan would be pac-

ing the floor. She should have been in hours ago. Earlier she had tried to put through another call to him but the lines were already down. It was past midnight now.

She wasn't sure any more of how near or far she was from home. Familiar landmarks had long since been swallowed up by

By  
**J E Brooks**

*Women are supposed to be emotional creatures who cannot withstand the rigors of emergencies. Don't you believe it. They oftentimes have the tenacity of a bulldozer and ride a situation through to an amazing conclusion.*

the dark, the rain. A sudden uneasiness crawled along the edge of her brain. It had been an hour at least since she had spotted a highway sign. She wasn't even sure she was on the right road. She eased over a little, slowing the crawling car to a full stop, lowering her window to peer into the night. A sharp gust of wind slapped her across the face, wetting her head and shoulders. There was nothing to see but rain and the shapeless black of night.

Shivering, she moved back behind the wheel. She wished now she had never gone to Northport in the first place. It wasn't as if she *had* to work any more. Evan was a wealthy man and she had quit when they were married, but quitting wasn't easy. Acting wasn't a job from which you could walk away; it went with you, clamoring sometimes unbearably for a stage. Evan had been understanding.

She inched the car forward again, losing the white line for minutes at a time, driving blindly. The uneasiness circling her brain began to revolve a little faster. The tugging of the wind, the hammering of rain, the blackness and isolation began to congeal, bringing a sense of urgency, of panic. She wanted only to be home. She couldn't stand much more of this five miles an hour business. Cau-

tiously she pressed the accelerator; the rain seemed to be letting up. The speedometer went to twenty, then twenty-five, then the white line dissolved. There was a jolt, the wet crunch of gravel and the sickening sound of tires spinning helplessly, digging into the soft wet earth by the side of the road. Her gloved fingers tightened over the wheel, her toe pressing harder on the gas pedal, jamming it finally to the floor. There was a mighty whirl from the engine and the right side of the car settled deeper in the mud. "Not *down*, you idiot!" she shouted over the whirl. "Out!" And then softly, to the car, to herself, to the gods, "Oh, please. . . ." And then at last, in hopeless resignation, "Damn, oh damn, damn. . . ."

She sat there for an eternity, twenty minutes by the clock on the dashboard, waiting for the rain to stop, for another car to pass, for something, anything. . . . Then the wind picked up again. A huge gust tore across the road, smacking the car broadside. The body under her seemed to lift, wedging the wheels a little deeper, rocking and swaying the high side of the car. A trembling started up in her. Another gust like that and the car would go over. The trembling didn't stop until she felt the pavement under her feet, the blast of

wind and rain against her body.

She pushed around to the front of the car, finding the edge of the road, following a beam from one of her headlights. She moved lightly, supple in the wind, infinitely grateful to be out in the open, expecting at any moment to hear the crash of the car rolling over behind her.

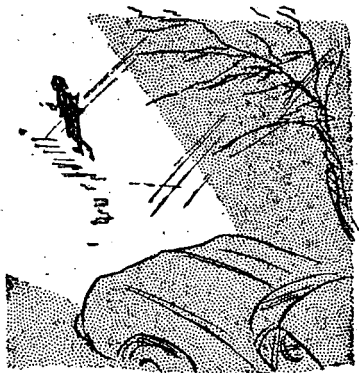
She wasn't aware of rounding the bend in the road. She only knew after awhile that the headlight's opaque funnels were gone, that it was dark and wet and unfathomably silent under the roar of wind and rain.

Every few yards now she stopped to raise her head and scan the darkness. The country couldn't be as isolated as it looked. The power failure that had put the phones out of order must have taken the electricity, too. Somewhere in that black morass there must be something, somebody. Per-

haps she should go back to the car. If it hadn't turned over by now it probably wouldn't at all. She stopped, hesitating, feeling the cold rake of wind across her wet body. Something caught her eye as she turned, a small light flickering in the distance. She wasn't sure now of which way she had turned. She had lost her sense of direction. It didn't matter. She stumbled forward, making for the light, watching it grow closer. There seemed to be several now, very dim and unsteady. She cut away from the road, feeling her way across a field, breaking through a hedge, coming upon some kind of driveway.

Following the drive, she saw it at last, rising broad and luminous out of the dark, its white pillars gleaming faintly in the dim light from the windows. Her heart gave a lurch of pure, undiluted joy. What an incredible stroke of luck! She broke into a run, racing up the winding drive.

At the front door she paused, glancing down at herself, grimacing unhappily. She looked like a drowned cat. A movement, half shrug, half shiver touched her shoulders. She reached out, knocking, waiting, hearing only the wind and the rain. Once more she seized the knocker, raising it high this time, banging it loudly, insist-



ently. Again she waited, feeling a rise of frustration. This was ridiculous. Someone *had* to be here. More in reflex than anticipation, she grasped the doorknob, astonished and delighted when it turned, a swift tide of relief scuttling the frustration.

The door opened only a few feet before it stopped with a thud. She frowned, hesitating a moment. It was all right; there was room to squeeze through. She slipped into the heavy shadows of the foyer, her feet tangling suddenly with a heap on the floor, an extension of the thing that had stopped the door. She teetered a moment and pitched forward, falling on top of the heap, the gasp in her throat swelling to a cry of horror. It was the lower half of a man's body, bound and inert beneath her.

A shudder slid down her spine. She pushed away from him, scrambling to her knees, halting abruptly as the front door cracked shut in the wind, revealing the man's head and shoulders. Terror leapt into her eyes. Her hand darted out, groping for the limp wrist, for a pulse. She didn't hear the uneven tread behind her. She heard nothing at all except the thunder of her own heart until a voice, cultured and resonant, cut a swath to her ears. "Good evening. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

She started violently, glancing toward the sound, seeing first the shoes, then the long line of trousers, then midway, held close to the thigh, the black, shiny nose of a revolver. She drew back, her breath catching over the sudden collapse of her lungs. "Who . . . who are you?" she breathed.

"My name is Cathcart," he replied affably, "and you have just presented yourself, rather informally, I must say, at Cathcart Manor." Her eyes searching the tall silhouette found the pale oval of his face, blurred and indistinguishable in the shadows. Beneath her fingertips came the steady throb of a pulse. The man on the floor was alive. She let his wrist slide from her hand and rose unsteadily to her feet, pulling in air, forcing it through the tightness in her chest. Stalling, fighting for time to collect her wits, she said unevenly, "Why . . . why are you holding a gun on me. . . ."

"Because," he answered wryly, the gun moving slightly to indicate the inert figure on the floor, "I have already entertained one uninvited guest this evening. I'm not sure that I'm up to that kind of strenuous hospitality a second time."

She glanced toward the floor and back to the gun in his hand. "I . . . I knocked," she said, her

lips shaping the words woodenly, "but there was no answer. . . ."

"There would have been," he chided, "if you had not been so impatient. It's the servants' night out and I'm a bit indisposed. I was quite prepared to answer the door as soon as I could reach it." He turned, motioning her through the foyer, bowing slightly over the gun. "I really must ask you to join me in the drawing room. I am rather urgently in need of a chair." He paused. "After you," he murmured.

She moved forward, feeling without seeing the gun at her back. His voice behind her had an electric quality, an undercurrent of tension. "Do you always come calling on strangers in the middle of the night?"

"No," she said quickly, feeling the rise of flesh on the back of her neck. "My car is stuck up on the road and I . . . I seem to be lost. . . ."

She stepped down, into a room laced with shadows from the fitful flickering of candles in a silver candlelabra; a second circle of light fanned out from a fire in the huge fireplace. Drawing a deep, ragged breath, she stopped, hearing his uneven tread stop behind her. She turned then, facing him, forcing the words through the sticky fear in her mouth. "I only

want to use your telephone," she said. "It's wet and cold . . . and . . . and windy out there. Your door wasn't locked and when no one answered, I just followed a . . . a natural instinct. . . ." She paused, turning her face from the steady probe of his eyes. "I just wanted to get in out of the rain," she finished in a small voice. "That's no reason for you to stand around pointing a gun at me."

"My dear young lady," he replied humbly, the tension gone from his voice, "You are absolutely right. I have been undeniably rude." He slipped the gun in his pocket and limped heavily toward a great winged armchair. "Matter of fact," he added, sinking into the chair, "your battle with the storm has left some first rate scars." A faint smile touched his pale face. "You're downright soggy. Stand by the hearth and see if you can dry out a bit."

She started to turn, pausing abruptly, her eyes fixed on the carpet between them. A trail of dark, wet spots dogged his footsteps to the chair. Instinctively she bent down, touching one of the spots, drawing her hand back sharply. "It's blood," she said, the color draining from her face, her glance darting over the carpet. "There's . . . there's blood all over the place. . . ." She was staring at

him in horror. "You . . . you shot him. . . ."

He leaned forward, examining the floor. "Dear girl," he said patiently, "if you will observe the trail, you will see that it leads unmistakably to this chair. I did not shoot him. Quite the contrary. He shot me." He glanced up at her, annoyed. "You look like you'd seen a ghost. What do you take me for, a psychopathic killer or something? The man was trying to rob me. I did nothing more than disarm him and knock him over the head." He bent over himself. "He was not so gentle." Half to himself he added, "My tourniquet must have come loose. Don't know much about these things. Certainly is bleeding, isn't it?" He reached down, gingerly raising a trouser leg. She felt a sudden contraction in her abdomen. The flesh near his ankle was laid open, a bright jagged hole leaking crimson below a white handkerchief knotted an inch or so above the wound. Her fear receded; compassion, swift and involuntary swept through her. She watched a moment, silent as he tightened the handkerchief, seeing the blood slow to a dribble. With sudden resolve, a new fear closing over her, she moved forward. "Here," she said abruptly, "I've had some Red Cross experience. Let me help you with that."

He looked up, relief in his face. "Could you?" he said. "I'd be most grateful. . . ."

She knelt by his side, hesitating. "You didn't know it was bleeding?"

He shook his head. "If I'd known, I'd have tightened the handkerchief sooner."

"Then it's numb."

"Numb as anything."

"Good," she breathed. "At least there's no pain." She touched the area around the wound. "Do you feel anything?"

"A little pressure is all."

She looked up at him. "Is there anything here to work with?"

"Over there. I'd just started to bandage it when you arrived."

She gathered up the first aid items and moved back to the chair, kneeling once more beside him. "It's better not to watch," she said quietly, glancing up at him.

"From the looks of you, you'd better not watch yourself. Are you all right?"

"Just a little queasy," she said, feeling the pin points of perspiration break on her upper lip. "I'll be fine. Please lean back. You make me nervous." He leaned back obediently.

"I'm going to take off the tourniquet," she murmured. "You've got it in the wrong place." She worked quickly, deftly, unknot-



ting the handkerchief, folding the gauze into a thick sponge, pressing it lightly against the wound. After a while she said thinly, "That does it. This ought to hold you till the doctor gets here." Gently she rolled the leg of his trousers down over the wound. "You'll probably feel a little faint. You've lost a lot of blood."

He nodded, his lips pale in his white face. "Light feeling," he said, gallantly producing a reassuring smile. "Quite pleasant." He sank a little deeper into the chair, closing his eyes. She waited, watching for a long time, the pulse in the hollow of her throat throbbing out beats like the tick of an accelerated clock.

At last, softly she said, "Do you have pain?"

"None at all," he murmured. "Completely numb."

She backed up to the hearth, her icy hands groping for warmth toward the flames. "It's a nasty wound. Will the doctor be here soon?"

"The telephone's . . . out of order. Couldn't get the doctor . . . or the police . . . or anyone." He roused himself a little. "I suppose we might try again. Would you . . . bring me the phone, please?"

She started forward, pausing abruptly. "Where is it?" she said.

"Over there, on that cabinet."

She brought it back, trailing the cord behind her. "Do you want me to dial for you?"

"Not helpless, my dear," he mumbled, holding out his hand, his arm dipping weakly, almost dropping the phone when she handed it to him. She watched as he dialed slowly, arduously, shaking his head once or twice as if trying to clear his vision. After a few minutes he lowered the receiver. "Nothing," he said. "Dead line." He leaned back again, his face very white. "We're stuck, I suppose . . . till the storm is over. . . ." The words came haltingly, slightly blurred.

She felt a little rivulet of perspiration trickle past her hair line and roll slowly down her temple. The trembling in her hands began to creep, reaching her shoulder, rippling across her back. She returned to the fireplace, clasping her elbows with crossed arms, trying to stop the shaking.

He was watching her curiously, blinking occasionally against the glaze that kept filling his eyes. "You look . . . positively ill," he said, his voice labored and faint. "Are you sure you haven't caught pneumonia or something. . . ."

She shook her head. "No," she answered, gripping her arms a little tighter, trying to steady her voice. "I'm worried about you."

"Don't . . . be silly. I feel perfectly . . . lovely. Just a little drowsy. Why are you worried about . . . me?"

"I'm afraid I've gone too far," she breathed. She gazed numbly at him, motionless except for the slight, convulsive jerking of her shoulders. "I didn't put the tourniquet back on your leg. You're bleeding to death."

His eyes widened, clearing for a moment. Incredulously he said, "Why should you want to kill me?"

"I don't," she answered, her face stark and frightened. "I just want you to lose consciousness."

"But why?"

"Because you're an imposter," she replied tonelessly.

A moment of silence hung, suspended, hovering between them like a trapped animal. Then slowly he lifted his hand, fumbling in his pocket, drawing out the gun. It wobbled loosely in his fingers. He reached over, supporting his wrist with his other hand. "Put . . . the tourniquet back," he said heavily, "or I shall have to kill you. . . ."

"No," she said tightly, her lungs bursting in her chest, "you haven't the strength to pull the trigger. And I don't think you would even if you could." Her glance flicked toward the foyer. "If you were a killer you'd have shot him in the

first place." Slowly, cautiously, she started toward him. "Drop the gun now so I can put the tourniquet back on. Please. Hurry." Her eyes pleaded. "I don't want you to die. I'm not a killer, either."

His hand, laboring to steady the gun, worked in a final spasm. Then futilely, wearily, his arm dropped to his knee and the gun slipped with a dull thud to the floor. "You win . . ." he whispered. "Can't even fire . . . a scare . . . shot. . . ." She picked up the gun, taking it quickly to the mantle, hurrying back to him, twisting the tourniquet into place. "You'll be all right now," she said, relief washing through her. "I . . . I really was afraid you'd die. . . ."

She straightened then, snatching a candle from the candelabra, hurrying into the foyer, bending over the man on the floor. He was almost conscious, his color good, his pulse strong. There was no sign of injury, no blood. He was all right. She needed only to cut the heavy twine binding his wrists and ankles. She bowed her head, a sob of relief filling her throat. From the other room came a resounding crash, the sound of a body falling. She whirled, racing into the drawing room, seeing him sprawled on the floor half way between the chair and the mantle.

She knelt beside him, checking

the tourniquet. "You're a fool to try to move," she said quietly.

"I'm . . . a fool anyway," he answered thickly. "I was . . . trying to get the gun. . . ."

"Please don't move again. I don't want you to die. Especially now."

"Why . . . especially now?"

"Because you really didn't harm him. I wasn't sure before."

"Needn't have . . . worried. Don't work with firearms. Dangerous you know. . . . It was . . . his gun. He wasn't supposed to . . . have been home. Took me . . . by surprise. . . ."

"What were you after?" she said softly.

"Silly question," he murmured heavily. "Money, of course. Got it, too. Emptied the safe. . . ." She saw the pride in his eyes before he closed them. "Just that . . . I couldn't get away. Rotten break. . . ." His voice trailed off into silence.

"Don't go to sleep," she said quickly. "Wait, I'll find some brandy. . . ."

His eyes flickered open. "Are you . . . really lost, or are you . . . my competitor. . . ."

A smile, crooked with comprehension brushed her lips. "I'm not a thief, if that's what you mean."

"I didn't think so. . . ." His eyes closed again. "I really should like to sleep awhile. . . ."

"No, no you mustn't sleep. I'll have to keep you awake. Just till the storm is over. Then I can call the doctor. And the police."

"The police . . . of course," he murmured. With effort he opened his eyes once more. "Tell me, was I . . . so unconvincing . . . as a country squire?"

"You were very convincing," she returned quietly, with genuine admiration.

"Then how did you know I wasn't Cathcart? That . . . this wasn't my house. . . ."

"Because," she answered gently, "the man in the hall is Cathcart—Evan Cathcart—and this is his house. I know," she added softly, starting once more for the foyer, "because he's my husband."





ation, they had dubbed him, with an irony that seemed to please them, "The Judge."

George Jones would have been called "The Mouse" had he been around Mom's guests long enough to earn a nickname. As it was, the sole recollection left in most minds was of a furtive, bird-like little man nearly completely hidden by four enormous suitcases as he scurried up the porch on the day of



# THE SEEING

**I**n the undistinguished resort run by Mom Potter high in the mountains, the most distinguished natural phenomenon was a tall, skinny, 71-year-old blind man. Partly through a curious devotion he had engendered in Mom's otherwise flinty heart, and partly through that instinctive talent for preying on others which is so often developed by the seemingly helpless, he had succeeded in reducing the other guests to the position of his errand boys and servitors. In retali-

his arrival at the Potter resort.

The Judge got to know him better. Twenty minutes after George arrived, there was a knock on his door. It was Mom.

"Open up," she said. "I've got an errand for you."

"But, lady," protested George, unlocking the door, "I just got here."

"I want you to take the Judge down to the city."

At the mention of the title, George flinched. "Look, lady, he

*The blind "Judge" in this opus operated on the assumption that his affliction invoked special consideration from his contemporary. Poor fellow. He forgot honor among thieves died long before the Capone era.*



said, "I don't want nothing to do with no . . ."

"He's not a real judge," Mom explained, as she did for all new guests, "and he can't see. He's blind. See?"

"But lady," George began again, his voice rising to a wail, "it's over fifty miles back to . . ."

"I must say I think that's very nice of you," said the Judge, el-

George. Whipping off his dark glasses, he stooped suddenly and brought his dead, sightless eyes within inches of George's horrified stare.

"Cheeps!" chirped George, backing suddenly away, "take it easy."

"Ah! A sensitive soul!" exclaimed the Judge. "A man after my own heart. Any time you're ready, George."

"Yes sir," said George.

"You know," said the Judge as they entered the car, "I've been here six months without finding the right man, but I have a hunch about you. Do you mind if I have a better look?"

"Hey! What are you doing?"

"Why, I'm having a better look," said the Judge mildly, as his long, slender fingers crept over George's face, tracing with delicate preci-

bowing Mom aside and marching briskly into the room. "And it will give us time for a nice chat. Why Mom," he exclaimed, turning to her, "this is one of the nicest rooms I've ever been in."

"I thought you said he was blind," sniffed George suspiciously.

"He is," said Mom, "but he don't miss much."

"Would you care to see for yourself, George?" asked the Judge. With a single long stride, he placed himself squarely in front of

EYE

By  
Warren  
Donahue

sion the hard, bald pate, the fluttering, watery eyes, the pulpy nose, sunken chin and bobbing Adam's apple that gave George's face its peculiar indistinctness.

"George," said the Judge, his own strongly-chiseled features breaking into a wry smile, "from a physical standpoint, you're practically ideal."

"Look, Judge," said George, pleadingly, "I'm awful tired. If this is some kind of rib . . ."

"Move on," ordered the Judge. "This is no rib."

Halfway down the winding slope the Judge said suddenly, "Quick! Pull in here!"

George hit the brakes, jerked the wheel, skidded the car to a screeching halt. They were in front of a soft drink stand.

"Now, what the hell . . ."

"Excellent reflexes," said the Judge. "Give me a light, will you?"

George took the matches, struck one, and cupped it in his hands. The Judge's slender fingers covered his, and brought the match into position.

"For a man who is as nervous as you are, George, you have remarkably steady hands," he said.

"Please, Judge," said George. "What the hell is this, an obstacle course?"

"Why George," exclaimed the

Judge, delight lighting his features, "that's exactly what it is. And you're doing marvelously. In fact, you may be the one."

"Please, Judge, I don't want to be the one."

"Drive on, George," ordered the Judge.

In the city, the Judge took over completely. "Take a left. Now a right. Another left." George obeyed mechanically. Finally, they were in the heart of the business district. "Stop here," ordered the Judge. "Find a place to park and come back and meet me in this bank."

"Here I am," whispered George, when he had returned. "Now what do you want?"

"Why, George," said the Judge, "I don't want anything. I simply thought you'd like to have a good look in daylight at the bank we're going to rob tonight."

"Gee, Judge, you shouldn't talk like that. You sound like you're off your rocker. Let's get out of here."

The Judge allowed himself to be led docilely out to the car.

"Tell me, George," he asked harshly, "just what is your racket?"

"Judge," said George, sternly, "you got to stop talking like that. I'm a—an accountant."

"Splendid! What sort of accounting do you do?"

"Er-um, ah, regular accounting."

"George," said the Judge, his voice rising in triumph, "you're perfect! You're exactly the kind of small-time, penny-ante crook that I've been waiting for."

"Gee, Judge, you shouldn't . . ."

"Let's get this straight, George," said the Judge, his voice hardening. "First, you're a crook. Or you wouldn't be allowed within twenty miles of Mom's. Did you think I was under the impression that it was a tourist resort? Because I'm blind? You will have to learn, George, that there are many advantages to being blind. Second, you're a small-time crook, or you wouldn't have been put in that crummy back room of Mom's. Whatever her faults, she has an excellent sense of status. And finally, George, you're a weakling. You have a weak face. You have a weak voice. You even lie weakly. Do we understand one another, George?"

"Yes sir," said George.

"No need to be hangdog, George. You will soon be rich," said the Judge cheerily. "But now we have work to do."

Under the Judge's drill-master instructions, George wheeled the car through the city streets, learning by dint of patient repetition the entire pattern of the city's traffic flow, the major arteries, the nar-

row cross-streets, and over and over, the twelve-minute route from bank to railroad station until he could have driven it blindfolded.

"George," said the Judge finally, "you make a splendid seeing-eye dog. Now back to Mom's, and report to my room at ten-thirty."

At exactly ten-thirty, there was a timorous knock on the Judge's door.

"Come in," said the Judge.

"Hey, what the—"

"Oh, I'm sorry, George. I forget the limitations of the sighted. You'll find the light switch next to the door. I'm afraid I have very little use for it."

The fumbling, scratching noises of George searching for the light switch were followed at last by the click of the switch and, after a momentary pause, a long, low, astonished whistle.

"Ah, an art-lover," said the Judge, his delicate, tapering finger tracing the final line of the clay he had been sculpturing.

"What's that!" exclaimed George.

"This, George," explained the Judge kindly, "is a bank."

"That's a *bank*!"

"George, you're looking in the wrong direction. I take it that what you are observing is a poor work of mine of a rather deep-bosomed, wide-hipped female. Done from memory, George.

That's the trouble with it. Of course, with your splendid assistance, I shall soon have the funds to work from life. Ah! Life! Come here, George."

As George's shuffling steps gave audible evidence of his reluctance to leave the work he had been admiring, the Judge's long arm snaked out and gripped him firmly at the back of the neck, forcing his attention to the table where he had been working. With his sculptor's tool as a pointer, the Judge outlined the perfect miniature of the bank.

"This is where I was standing today. Here are the tellers' cages. Over here, the manager's office. Back here, the vaults. Here are the accounting offices. You said you were an accountant, I believe. And here—observe carefully—is where we enter. Now!"

Over and over, exactly as he had taught George the pattern of the city, the Judge led him now through a step-by-step detailing of the robbery until he could repeat it verbatim. Finally, he was satisfied.

"We leave in a half-hour, George. Now how about a drink to tone up the system? Just one to—" The glass in his hand half-raised, the Judge stopped abruptly.

"George, there is no sound in the world like the click of the

safety catch on an automatic. No, George, give it here."

With extraordinary speed, the Judge stepped forward and, grabbing George's wrist in one powerful hand, he removed the automatic with the other.

"George, you're a fool. Were you testing me? Or were you testing yourself? Were you trying to decide if you could commit murder? You fool! Take my word for it, you can't. You're not the type. You haven't the stomach for it. But I have, George. You want to dissolve our partnership? Very well."

Raising the gun, the Judge pointed it steadily at George.

"You're looking right into the barrel, aren't you, George? Now watch my finger as it tightens on the trigger."

"No, Judge! No!"

"Watch the finger, George. See it tightening?"

"No, Judge. Please! Listen! Judge!"

*Snap!* The hammer of the gun clicked down.

"What do you know, George, a misfire! Well, if at first you don't succeed . . ."

"Judge! Please!"

*Snap! Snap!* Twice more the gun clicked as the Judge calmly pulled the trigger. Suddenly the Judge bent over in a convulsion of



laughter, reveling in his joke.

"Oh, George! What I would have given to see your face! I told you that you were small-time and penny-ante. I really was surprised to find your gun this afternoon, so I took the precaution of removing the bullets. For your own safety, you understand, George. You were never in any danger, let me add, since it was obvious from the weight of the gun that you hadn't reloaded it. If only I could have seen your face!"

Putting the gun in his pocket, the Judge pressed a drink into George's sweating, trembling hands. George gulped it in great noisy, sobbing draughts.

"All right, George," said the Judge, once more kindly, "pull yourself together. Get your things and meet me at the car in exactly fifteen minutes."

George stumbled to the door, opened it, and said, "Judge . . ."

"Yes, George?"

"Judge, you're a mean, no-good."

"Why, thank you, George," said the Judge. "At last, we understand one another."

"Nine, ten, eleven, now!" whispered the Judge, crouched in the darkness of the bank, and a dull, muffled *boom* told him his timing

had been precise, well calculated.

"Cheez, Judge! Look at that!"

"What do you see, you fool? Tell me!"

"Money! Tons of it! Cheez!"

"Shut up and start shoveling it into this suitcase. Remember—nothing less than fifties. Do you understand? Hurry!"

Three minutes later, precisely on schedule, they were in the car, traveling at a law-abiding 30-miles-per-hour, to the railroad station.

Seventeen minutes later, they were seated in a compartment of the train, speeding south at a measured 60-miles-per-hour.

"Now George, we begin the most delicate phase of our operations. We divide the money."

"Boy, let me at it!" cried George.

"Restrain yourself, George. First I must explain the ground rules. Item One: Clean out one of your suitcases and bring it here."

As George struggled with his enormous suitcases, noisily snapping clasps, transferring his belongings, the Judge opened a small silver flask and carefully measured two equal portions into water glasses. When George had placed his empty suitcase beside the one holding the money, the Judge held up his hand.

"George, a toast to our success! But observe, first, and very care-

fully, the glasses that I've used."

"What about the glasses?"

"Are they equal, George?"

"Sure."

"Does it matter which one I pick? Will I get the same amount as you, no matter which I choose?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Then this, George, is how we divide the money. Do you understand? I can't read the denominations, George, but I can, I feel sure, rely on you and your weakness, your unwillingness to take a chance. Because while you divide the money, George, I do the choosing. Is that clear, George? Unless you divide the money into exactly equal amounts, you run the risk that I will choose the larger. I have no doubt that you would like to take it all. But I see no way for you to cheat me. Should you try, George, I will take it all."

"Cheez, Judge, I wouldn't try to cheat you."

"Begin, George. Call off the denominations, and divide them."

Humming merrily throughout the counting, the Judge, at the end, chose the pile nearest him, returning it to his own suitcase.

"Now George," he said, "both suitcases, yours and mine, are exactly equal. Is that correct?"

"They sure are."

"Splendid. Now, as one further precaution, just so they don't get

mixed up with the rest of your luggage, I'll put them both here under my berth for safekeeping."

When he had stowed the suitcases carefully away, the Judge straightened to his full height and smiled benignly.

"George, I think a little celebration is in order. Suppose you go down to the dining car and get us a bottle of champagne. Get two bottles."

"Gee, Judge, can't we ring for it?"

"Now George, let me do the thinking. We don't want people remembering the two of us together, do we? Go ahead like a good fellow. And get chilled glasses. If he doesn't have them chilled, wait for them."

Mumbling unhappily to himself, George left the compartment.

For a long moment, the Judge listened intently to the retreating footsteps. Then he knelt beside the berth and, with the meticulous tidiness that only old bachelors possess, neatly transferred the half of the money that was in George's suitcase to his own.

One step remained. It was not necessary, but it pleased the Judge's sense of symmetry.

Moving lightly, he explored George's luggage. There was one suitcase of the size of the money suitcase, but it was locked. A larg-

er one, held together by straps, yielded what he wanted. From it, he extracted a pair of shoes, pants, a shirt and some ties. These he stuffed into the suitcase from which he had taken George's share of the money.

The champagne was excellent.

Toward dawn, the train began to slow. In the compartment, the Judge prodded George awake.

"What happens now?" George's sleepy voice demanded.

"You leave the train here, George, and you're on your own. I go on."

George was dressed before the train had fully stopped. His suitcases under one arm, he reached for the last suitcase under the Judge's berth.

"Not yet, George. I think you'd better wait to be the last one off."

"Yeah, sure."

When the cry of "All Aboard" gave evidence that the train was ready to pull out, the Judge yanked George's suitcase from beneath his berth.

"Come on, George," he said, "I'll carry it out to the steps for you."

When they reached the steps, the train was just beginning to move. George scrambled down the steps.

"George," said the Judge, above the gathering noises of the train, "I want you to remember one thing: Go straight. You haven't got what it takes to be a crook. Whatever your racket is, I'm sure you're a failure at it."

"Judge!" shouted George, now trotting alongside the moving train, "throw me my suitcase."

"Here, George," said the Judge.

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Dear Fans:

*My desk is so weighed down with mail, requesting information about the Alfred Hitchcock Fan Club, I hope you won't mind if I reply in an open letter. Here are the particulars:*

*Membership dues are fifty cents which covers mailing costs and handling. (Please send coins or money orders, no stamps.) For this you will receive an autographed photo of Mr. Hitchcock, his biography, and a bulletin of current news, which will be issued four times a year. You can't imagine how rewarding it is to hear from so many loyal readers, and active, and incoming Fan Club members. I want to thank all of you for your enthusiastic interest.*

P. O. Box 434

Most sincerely,  
Pat Hitchcock  
Tarzana, California

He held the suitcase out at arm's length and snapped open the lock. Out tumbled George's ties, shirt, pants and shoes. They fell to the ground along the track, followed by the empty suitcase.

The Judge collapsed in a roar of laughter.

When the local police came, they were very courteous. So was the Judge. Only the model was frightened. She jumped up and ran, screaming, from the room, clutching a coverlet to hide her nakedness.

The police were apologetic. They hated to disturb so important an artist at his work. They spoke in deferential, and admiring, tones of his just completed work, a recumbent statue of a deep-bosomed, wide-hipped woman.

The Judge thanked them for their appreciation.

"And now to business, gentlemen," he said crisply.

"We have, senor," said the spokesman, "to trouble you about these." He passed the bills in his hand to the Judge. "They are very large denominations."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said the Judge impatiently. "And you checked the serial numbers. I expected you to."

"But senor—"

"Look, you blockhead," said the Judge, his voice biting, "I'm not admitting a thing. But let me tell you why I chose your delightful country. In addition to your climate, and your beautiful women, you happen to have no extradition treaty with the United States. No extradition treaty. Do you understand?"

"But senor, the bills—"

"What about the bills?"

"The bills, senor, they are counterfeit."

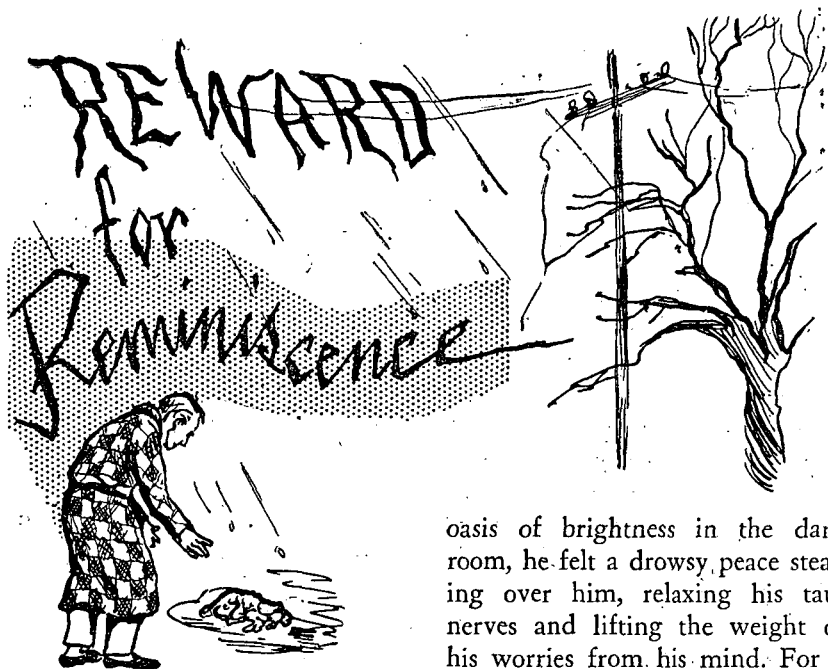
"Counterfeit? Listen, you, do you think these hands can't tell the difference between good paper and bad?"

"But that is what is so extraordinary, senor. The paper is indeed very, very good. But the printing, senor, the printing is atrocious. Only a bungling amateur would make such a printing."

The Judge sank to the couch, a terrible realization seeping into his consciousness.

The other suitcase! The suitcase of George's that had been locked. It had seemed like the money suitcase. Like it? It was the money suitcase. George had switched them before counting the money. The money he had counted so carefully had been the counterfeit.

"Oh no," the Judge said. "Oh no!" And then, to no one in particular, "So that was his racket."



USUALLY the rain bothered him, and he kept wondering about things like open windows, leaks, and whether he would have to wear galoshes to work the next morning. Tonight things were different. Nora was out to her monthly bridge party, the house was locked up, and as he lay in bed with the small pool of light from the reading lamp forming an

oasis of brightness in the dark room, he felt a drowsy peace stealing over him, relaxing his taut nerves and lifting the weight of his worries from his mind. For a few minutes, at least, he felt apart from the daily pressures. The nagging voices of his frustrations and responsibilities faded to a murmur, and he lay immersed in a

by  
Christopher  
K. Allan

*Providence plays an important role, detouring disaster, in the life of this harassed husband whose unhappiness almost drives him to dangerous measures.*

sea of detached, twilight warmth.

After a few minutes he reached over with one hand to the little radio beside the bed. There was a click, a preliminary hum, and finally the soft beat of a dance band ebbed through the darkness. He listened. There was a commercial, the disc jockey said something, and then came the rich, mellow strains of an old Glen Miller recording.

String of Pearls. He lit a cigarette, propped himself up on the pillows, and allowed his memory to drift back over the years . . . back . . . back to a highschool prom . . .

The big gymnasium had been transformed by strings of Japanese lanterns and ribbons of crepe paper; there had been the gay whirl of colorful evening gowns, the flush in young cheeks, and the brave, careful formality of the suddenly serious young men in their first tuxedos, terribly conscious of doing the proper thing, awkwardly stiff, yet intense as one can be only at eighteen. For that had been a special Prom . . . not only had it been their very own Senior Prom, but the band on the bandstand had been the Glenn Miller Band . . . the one and only Glenn Miller. It had taken heroic effort and a great deal of sacrifice to raise the money, but it had hap-

pened, that magic night. He remembered dancing in a rosy daze to the mellow music, stealing a glance, as all the others were, whenever he could without being conspicuous, at the musicians; almost pinching himself as he feasted his eyes on the tall, smiling figure at the head of the band, now with trombone in hand, now leading. Yes, he reminisced, it had been quite a night. Particularly for him.

Perhaps it had been the music . . . perhaps . . . well, Nora had always been beautiful. He remembered her as she had looked that night as vividly as though he had shyly kissed her good night for the first time yesterday. Perhaps it had been the semi-intoxication of the entire evening. Everyone, he reflected, is entitled to at least one Perfect Evening in his life. And that had been his Perfect Evening. For that night, on her front porch, after the dance was over but with the music still lingering in his ears, he had somehow managed to fumble and blurt out the words he had been desperately hoping to find . . . he had proposed to Nora. And she had accepted. Then they had sealed it with a kiss.

Not that anyone had taken either of them seriously, at first. Highschool kids were, after all, just Highschool kids, and there

was certainly no reason to pay much attention when two of them began to talk like adults, and speak of marriage. So there had been over a year of waiting. Nora had worn his ring while he had gone to business school, finished his work in Business and Cost Accounting, and taken some extra work in Management Procedures, with a hopeful eye on the future. Then, equipped with his diploma and a letter of recommendation, he had begun looking for a job. That was when he had found his first . . . and only . . . job, at Perlin and Swayze, as a clerk in the accounting department. They had looked forward to great things, then. The future was before them, and they were ready for it. He sighed. The radio had done with Glenn Miller and was playing a nasal hillbilly ballad. He abruptly switched it off, and lay staring into the darkness.

Unconsciously, he glanced at the large photograph on the bureau. In the thick darkness he could barely distinguish the outlines of the gilt frame. The picture itself was invisible, but he knew it well. The traditional wedding picture. Nora in an expensive lace gown, himself in the same tuxedo he had worn to the dance over a year earlier, both radiant. He remembered the mad whirl of events leading

up to the wedding, the round of envious congratulations from the local boys his own age, for Nora had been one of the Highschool beauties; the showers for Nora, the trips to the church to set the wedding date and then hold rehearsals, the shyly confident trip to Krensel's to select their furniture (budget plan). He chuckled slightly in the darkness as he recalled the furious blush with which Nora had helped him select the bedroom suite. The salesman, an unctuous, balding little man with a waxed moustache, had been very much the man of the world.

"This double bed is fine and comfortable . . . innerspring mattress, and lots of room to move around, you know." He had winked at that point. "You won't want twin beds for a few years yet. Wait'll you get to be my age, then worry about that."

Nora's face had been scarlet, but the quick, firm pressure of her hand on his had told him what he wanted to know. They had bought the double bed.

He sighed in the darkness, and glanced again in the direction of the photograph. Its frame glinted dimly in the reflection from his reading light. Standard equipment for every home. Some people kept them to remind themselves they had once been young. Others kept

them to remind themselves they had once been married.

The cigarette burned his fingers, and mechanically he snubbed it out in the ashtray on the night table between their beds. He thought of the years which had passed since the first giddy, intoxicating weeks of their marriage. How much fun it had been to entertain their friends of highschool days, suddenly so much the younger set, so much younger than they, for example, who were the only married couple out of the bunch. Others had married afterward, of course . . . Dan and Rosemary Everett, for instance, and Charlie and Virginia Holloway . . . but for over a year, they had been the only married couple. The Old Married Folks, as they jokingly called themselves. Until the joke began to wear thin.

Not that anything had begun to go wrong right away. At first, Nora had made light of their money troubles. If they couldn't afford a new car, well, that would come later. If Nora had to wear the same dress for this year's Easter that she had worn last year, it was one of the things one could expect a young bride to accept. And accept it she did, with a smile that told all and sundry that her love was so great that these petty sacrifices meant nothing. As for him

he had worn the same three suits regularly, always neatly pressed, and never asked for more. The shine on the seat of his pants had been no greater than the glow of the love in his heart for Nora.

He thought about sleep, but sleep would not come. Idly, his mind fumbled haphazardly through the collection of his memories of married life, trying, as he had so often tried before, to point to a single event, a single word which could have marked the beginning of the change. Had it been the time Nora had burst into tears after seeing Rosemary Everett in a brand new and obviously expensive cocktail gown? What good was it to explain that George Everett, Dan's father, owned half of the real estate in the new Northside Development, and had paid for the gown for his daughter-in-law himself, as a birthday gift? Had it been the time he had come home and tried to explain to Nora why he had not been selected for the position of Chief Accountant left open by old Krey's retirement?

"Victor Swayze himself told me, dear, that I was given every consideration, and he promised faithfully that the next time . . . just that Fitzroy had a little more experience at estimating than I do, and after all . . ."

Words. Words, and more words.



Words were cheap, didn't cost anything. And you couldn't eat words. He sighed, put on his dressing gown and slippers, and groped his way through the darkness toward the kitchen. Might just as well have a snack. He found the switch of the little pin-up lamp on the wall, and lit it. The kitchen leapt into focus, the comfortable but worn breakfast set, the elderly refrigerator purring quietly in its corner, the electric clock on the wall pointing to a quarter to one.

He poured himself a glass of milk, and glumly surveyed the shelves of the refrigerator. Leftovers, neatly stored in little plastic containers. Nora bought that brand of coleslaw because of the containers. The coleslaw consumed, the containers took on new duties, mute testimonials to the important part that leftovers played in their meals. There must have been half a dozen of those containers.

He poked around amidst them. Cold stewed tomatoes. Two soggy boiled potatoes. Spinach. Some unidentifiable yellow goo. Cold meatloaf. He decided on the meatloaf. As he busied himself with the mechanics of making a sandwich, he heard a scratching at the door to the shed, and a shrill, complaining whimper filtered through the crack under the door. With a mumbled imprecation, he took off

the latch and let Bitsy in. The small gray poodle stepped into the room carefully, rheumy little eyes peering uncertainly through the dim light. Looking for Nora, he thought. The animal was devoted to her, and she returned the affection with a lavish display which was all the more painful because he realized the true reason for it. Bitsy was all Nora had. And a woman must have something, he reflected. Even if it is only a nondescript little poodle. Somehow, Bitsy had become to him a living symbol of reproach. In his more generous moments, he tried not to hate the dog, and to remember that it was his own inadequacy which was the cause of their childlessness. Other times, he simply hated the animal, not bothering or caring to analyze its status in their household.

He thought about kicking the dog, but gave it up as a bad idea. Nora would find out about it somehow. Sometimes he thought the creature could actually talk to her. With a baleful glance, he set a dish of dogfood on a folded newspaper, sat down at the scarred table, and began to munch his sandwich.

The worst part of it, he reflected, was the endless, barren stretch of the future. The knowledge that life would undoubtedly continue

in its present grim pattern indefinitely lay upon him like a heavy, leaden weight. A man should have something in life, it seemed to him. There should be something for him to live for, some person, some dream, some plan . . . even an illusion would be welcome. But he had come too far for illusions. Illusions were for those who could afford to live with them.

Idly, he picked up the last Sunday's paper, lying on top of a neat stack in the corner by the refrigerator. He leafed through the comics. He had already read them, and the antics of the painted characters suddenly seemed pointless and tiring. He leafed further. Editorials. He had enough troubles of his own. Resorts. His eye lingered on a lavish advertisement for a swank Miami hotel, profusely illustrated with bikini-clad models. He read further. Nassau. More models.

Some people could afford those things, he mused. Some people went to Miami regularly. Rosemary and Dan Everett, for instance, had spent three weeks there last summer, and returned properly tanned and full of glowing tales of the doings of the better circles in Miami society. He remembered how brave a front Nora had put up when the Everetts had come to call after their Miami visit. Rosemary had brought a box

of some sort of tropical fruit candy for Nora, and Dan had given him a box of fine Havana cigars. "Get 'em real cheap down there, you know . . . no freight rates to bother about." After they had gone, Nora had sat quietly for a moment and said nothing. Then she had risen deliberately, emptied the candy into the garbage can, and gone upstairs. Words would have been anticlimactic.

A flash of light from outside the kitchen window interrupted his brown study. Fall storm. The wind was beginning to pick up and blow in heavy gusts. For an instant he wondered about Nora, driving home through the rain and wind. But he remembered other nights when she had driven through bad weather with no difficulties. He remembered the evenings he had taken her out in his old flivver to give her driving lessons, just after they had been married. It had been pleasant work, he recalled. Not all of their time had been devoted to driving. Now, she drove wherever she wanted, by herself. Things had changed.

Fumbling in the pocket of his robe, he found his cigarettes, lit one, and stared into the darkness. With uncompromising honesty, he faced facts. At forty-eight, he had gone as far as he would ever go.

The house was almost paid for, and it was here they would stay. Recently, without telling Nora, he had worked out their financial situation to the decimal point. Moving was out of the question. It was all they could do to keep up payments as it was. There were still two years more left to pay on the house, plus the payments on their new television set, the late model used car, the new rugs. Nora had insisted on having for the living room, the insurance . . . he sighed, then smiled sourly as he thought of the insurance. Charlie Holloway was a good salesman, and this, coupled with the fact that each of them had a vague, indefinable fear of being left alone and destitute, had caused them to plunge more heavily than commonsense would have dictated. "Till Death do us Part". He chuckled sardonically, thinking of the heavy payments which were their monthly tribute to this neurosis.

Outside the storm grew in intensity, and he listened as the wind played havoc with the trees along the driveway back of the house, surging in mighty gusts through the branches and blowing leaves prematurely from the limbs. Bitsy, uneasy, whined questioningly as the windows rattled and rain pelted like gravel against the roof

of the shed. Absently, he puffed his cigarette and peered into his murky future.

Suddenly, the lights flickered, held bright for a split second, then went out. For a moment he sat still, unwilling to bring his mind to focus on the problems of the immediate present. He waited. Perhaps they would fix it. Probably a power failure or something. They would fix it in a minute or two. He lit another cigarette.

Time passed. He drowned impatiently into the darkness and waited. Finally, peering carefully into the blackness outside, he noticed that the rain seemed to have died down. The wind was fading away to a whisper, and little by little, a trickle of silvery moonlight ebbed through the scudding clouds. That last big gust must have marked the turning point of the storm. He peered out the back window, and found that he could make out the shapes of objects on the back lawn: the garage, the maple tree, and the tangled masses of branches ripped off at the height of the storm. He swore softly as he saw that the biggest tangle was lying squarely in the middle of the walk from the garage to the kitchen door. Without thinking, he knotted the cord of his bathrobe tightly, opened the shed door, and stepped onto the glistening wetness

of the back walk. Then he gasped.

Something small and furry slipped between his legs and raced ahead. Damn that dog! He had forgotten about Bitsy. If Nora came home and found Bitsy out, it would just give her something else to harp on for another week. Mumbling to himself, he started down the walk. As he groped his way, avoiding branches and other debris, he heard one sharp, surprised yelp from the walk ahead, followed by silence. Puzzled, he called softly, "Bitsy? Bitsy! Here, Bitsy!"

No answer. Cautiously, he inched forward, peering carefully at the walk as he progressed. Something small and white lay in the middle of the walk; huddled grotesquely beside what seemed to be a pool of water. He edged slowly forward, wishing he had remembered to bring a flashlight. The clouds trickled away from the moon, and he could plainly see the little mongrel, lying very still. Perplexed, he peered into the shadows. Nothing moved.

He bent down to look more closely, and saw that Bitsy was either dead or unconscious. Half hesitating, he reached out his hand and had almost touched the animal, when he saw the wire, and straightened up with a sharp intake of breath. This was why

the lights had gone out! The main power cable, he remembered, ran athwart his back yard, to make connection with a junction box on a pole in the driveway behind the house. And the storm had blown it down.

Long, black and thick, it snaked its way through the pool of water on into the tangled blackness of the branches piled in the walkway. Bitsy, of course, had been electrocuted instantly on stepping into the pool. Beads of cold sweat broke out on his forehead as he thought how close he had come to joining the dog. If he had not seen it in time . . . he stared, then frowned as he thought about Nora, who would be coming home any minute from her bridge club. Usually, she preferred to drive into the garage, lock it, and come into the house by the back door. He stared at the lethal pool. Not a chance of moving that wire . . . he shuddered at the sight of Bitsy. Phone the electric company? Couldn't get here in time. Nora was due home any minute, and they probably were swamped with calls anyway. And, with all the wires down, there was no way of telling whether the phone would be working, for that matter. Probably the phone wires were down too.

Trouble was, he continued his silent analysis of the situation, she

would probably come up the back driveway, see Bitsy, and she'd be right down on her knees, right in the middle of that pool of . . .

He straightened up, expelling his breath with a long, soft whoosh.

Fascinated, he stared at the pool as the idea crawled out of the back of his mind. The silvery moonlight reflected in little shimmers from its black surface, and on the edge of it, by the walk, Bitsy lay very still. A sudden revulsion gripped him, making him clench his fists so hard that his fingernails dug into the palms of his hands. He stood rigid, the breeze toying with his sparse hair, gently tugging at the tassels of his robe. Through his mind raced the pitiful spectacle of their married life . . . the carefree beginning, the gradual encroachment of merciless reality, and finally the grim farce of the past half dozen years, when he had watched in silent agony as Nora had changed from a sweet highschool girl he had once known into a sour, sharp-tongued, middle-aged shrew. Their marriage, he knew, was dead. Like a blighted tree it had died slowly from within; still standing, it was rotten to the core.

He knew with a terrible clarity that no matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, it would never be enough. He had

reached the limit of his potential, and it simply was not enough for Nora. He thought of Rosemary and Dan Everett, suntanned, back from Miami. He remembered the look on Nora's face when she had emptied the candy into the garbage can. He looked into the future, and shuddered.

The little pool of water shimmered quietly in the flickering moonlight. He stood quietly, staring at the crumpled white bundle which had once been Bitsy. With a start, he realized that his nails had dug into the palms of his hands so deeply they had brought blood. He forced his hands open, and stood rigid, inhaling deep lungfuls of the crisp night air. This is what has to be done, he thought. This is the only way. There's nothing to it . . . I don't have to do anything . . . it's what I won't do that counts. I'll just go back into the house, and pretend to be asleep in bed. That's all. Simple, really. Then I'll wait. She'll go looking for Bitsy, and when she finds her . . . A vivid picture of Nora lying face down in the pool of water leapt into his mind. Only it wasn't Nora . . . it was what Nora used to be . . . through the mist of tears he could see her, in the fluffy evening gown, the gown she had worn at the dance that evening. . . .

He stretched out his hand involuntarily, with a half-sobbing cry, then blinked, and turned blindly toward the house. The beam of the flashlight caught him squarely in the eyes, and he stared into it, transfixed, like an animal, unmoving.

"Your name Robinson?" The voice was gruff, sympathetic.

"Robinson? Why, yes . . . yes . . . Robinson . . ."

"Wife's name Nora? The moonlight glinted on a silver badge.

"Nora? Nora . . . what happened? Where is Nora?"

"Sorry, fellow. She was out driving tonight, wasn't she?" It was a statement, not a question, but he replied.

"She went to her bridge club. She always does, you know . . . second Friday of every month . . . I mean, they all enjoy it . . . the girls . . ." his voice trailed off.

"She driving a fifty-eight Ford, light blue hardtop? License number D-10938?"

"Yes . . . we have a car just like that . . . I mean . . . but I forget the license. I can go get my

owner's card, and look it up, if you want." He waved his hands vaguely.

"Never mind. It was her, I'm afraid. We got her pocketbook. That's how we knew where to come find you."

"What happened?" he asked.

"Mr. Robinson, your wife was dead on arrival at Memorial Hospital. I guess it must of been all that rain . . . she probably couldn't see, or maybe she skidded . . . you know that big embankment out on Marriot Parkway? Out by the interchange? Well, . . ."

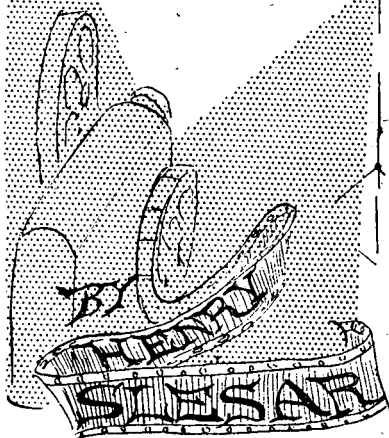
The voice faded out of his consciousness, and he suddenly felt sick at his stomach. A big arm reached out and caught him as he swayed. Another form loomed out of the darkness. The rough voice was almost gentle.

"Here, George, help me get this guy inside. He's ready to pass out. Hell, I always hate to have to break that kind of news to somebody. Gets me shook up. Poor guy, lost his wife. I always wish I could get somebody else to handle this detail."



# Starring THE DEFENSE

A NOVELETTE



MILES CRAWFORD, deep in a dream of the past, was sprawled in the library armchair and looking boyish, gray hairs and all, boyish. Jenny, his maid, clucked over him maternally before shaking him awake.

"Mr. Crawford? You know Mr. Brody been outside half an hour? You forget he was coming over?"

"Sam?" Miles got to his feet, agile for his sixty years, and went to the door. "What the hell are you

*Every actor dreams of the day when he can hold an audience spellbound, but few find themselves confronting a courtroom as a proving ground.*

doing out there? Why didn't you wake me?"

On the sofa, Sam Brody looked up with bloodhound eyes and raised his glass in salute. "You're an old man," he said. "You need your rest."

"Look who's talking," Miles grunted, and went to pick up a heavy wool sweater from the back of his chair. "Jenny!" he bellowed. "Turn up the thermostat, it's an icebox in this room!" He flopped into a seat and shivered. "What do you say, Sam? You and me for the golden west this year?"

"Phooey," Sam said. "What do you take me for? I let you within ten miles of a movie camera, you'll be talking about comebacks. Stick with the law business, it's not so bad."

"We're not getting rich at it," Miles grumbled. "You know I settled the Dearborn case today? The old lady who smashed his car offered three hundred dollars, and he took it. The court will probably award us a hundred if we're lucky."

"What do you expect in a town like this? You want big-money cases, you picked the wrong partner."

"I got the right partner," Miles said, smiling. "Who else loses at gin rummy like you do? Come on, let's crack a deck."

Miles, chuckling, padded over to the breakfront and took a fresh pack of cards from the top drawer. He was slitting the seal when they heard the front door slam, and he exchanged a look with Sam that communicated curiosity and concern.

"Must be Tod," he whispered. "Funny. It's still early."

He walked rapidly to the front hallway. It was Tod, all right, and his concern deepened at the sight of his son's blanched face. Tod was in his early twenties, light-boned like Miles, but half a head taller. He had the brown eyes of his mother, Miles' second wife Elena, but the deep sockets that hid their brown warmth were Miles'.

"What's this, a new leaf?" Miles said, with forced levity. "Only ten o'clock and home already?"

Tod was holding the elbow of his left arm. He looked at his father sullenly, but didn't answer. Then he went to the staircase that rose steeply to the second floor of the house.

"Tod!" (Keep the anger out, Miles said to himself, you know this moody kid.) "You could at least answer me. Just a word?"

"I'm going up," Tod said.

He did, and in a hurry, and Miles heard the slam of his bedroom door. He turned to find Sam



beside him, sharing the worry. "What's up?" Sam said. "The kid all right?"

"Sure he's all right," Miles snapped. "Like a tiger's all right, after it takes a chunk out of you. Don't you know my son by now?"

Sam walked over to the stairs.

"Well, let's go, what are you waiting for?" Miles said furiously. "You came to play cards, let's play!"

"Miles," Sam said.

"What is it?"

"Take a look. Am I crazy, or is somebody bleeding around here?"

Miles went to him, stooped where he stooped, touched the carpet where he touched, and looked dumbly at the red stain on his fingertips. Then he backtracked the boy's footsteps to the front door and saw the other crimson traces.

Sam said: "You want me to come up with you?" Miles shook his head. He took the steps two at a time, and didn't make the customary hesitation at the door of Tod's room. He was never fully welcome here, but now he walked in without invitation.

Tod had stripped off his jacket and was coming out of the bathroom. His left shirt sleeve had been rolled, and there was a white towel wrapped about the forearm. He looked at his father sharply, critical of the intrusion, but there was

also a commingling of guilt and shame in his eyes. The towel became some sort of indecent, humiliating object.

"What happened?" Miles said. "How did you hurt yourself?"

"Scratch," Tod mumbled. "Little car accident, nothing serious. Would you mind, Pop? I feel like hitting the sack."

"That's no scratch," Miles said. "It's bleeding pretty bad. Let me see it."

He put his hand out, and Tod whirled away. "I said it's nothing! Will you stop picking on me?" The towel edge flapped over, and Miles saw the termination point of the wound. He winced, and gestured helplessly.

"Let me call a doctor. You could get blood poisoning from that."



How did it happen? Did you hit somebody?"

"The car's all right."

"I'm not asking about the car! I want to know what happened!" He stepped forward too quickly to be avoided and grasped the boy's shoulder. "What kind of accident, Tod?"

"All right! It wasn't an accident. It was a fight!"

"A fight? What kind of a fight?"

"Like any other kind!"

There were thumpings outside; Sam, breathing heavily, was coming up to the landing. "Miles," Sam was saying, trying to breathe and talk at the same time, and too short-winded for both. "Miles, you better come down here."

"What is it?"

Sam leaned in the doorway, panting. "Car pulled up, police car. They'll be in the driveway in a minute. Is Tod okay?" He searched the room with his weak eyes. Tod was pacing now, making noises in his throat.

"Police?" Miles said. He glared at his son accusingly. "A little fight, huh? For God's sake, Tod, what did you do?"

"Nothing, I told you!"

"Miles," Sam said, "you better come down."

"I'm coming, I'm coming!"

They went down the stairs together. Tod didn't trouble to close

the door after them. By the time they reached the front hallway, the doorbell was ringing.

The officer was polite. "This the home of Tod Crawford? Excuse me, Mr. Crawford, is your son home? Little trouble on Route 4. Well, no, maybe more than a little. For questioning."

Then they were in the house, both of them, polite still but wary, hands leaning on the shiny leather gun belts.

"Tod!" Miles shouted. "Tod, come down." When there wasn't any answer, he looked at Sam pleadingly, sharing fearful thoughts about what Tod might do.

Then Tod appeared. He surveyed them from the second floor railing, the towel knotted around his wounded arm, his jacket slung over his right shoulder. He had the sneer of a movie tough on his face, but Miles knew a performance when he saw one. Behind Miles, one of the officers snapped the button on his holster. But there wasn't going to be any trouble. Tod was coming down.

"Your name Tod Crawford?"

"That's right."

"Listen officer—" Miles came between them, and the patrolmen frowned and shifted uncomfortably and asked him not to interfere. Tod thought that was funny;

he smiled at this ironical twist.

"Don't you know my old man?" he said. "Don't you know Miles Crawford, the movie star?" He made them glance at Miles, but the glance was empty of interest or recognition? "It's okay," Tod said. "I won't give you a hard time. Should I take some things with me?"

"What did he do?" Miles said. "For God's sake, you can't just drag him out of here without an explanation! Have you got a warrant?"

"Yes, sir, we have a warrant. Your son got into trouble with a boy named Jules Herman, they had a fight out on Route 4. The boy was cut up pretty bad."

"How bad?" Miles said.

"Take some overnight stuff," the other officer told Tod. "Your father can bring you anything else you need in the morning. Sorry, but we got to be going now."

"Wait, wait!" Miles said quickly. "I'm coming with you." He reached the hall closet in two strides and began fumbling for his coat. "Where are we going? What's your precinct?"

"Eighth Precinct, Mr. Crawford, only you'll have to take your own car. Maybe you'd be better off waiting until morning, nothing much is going to happen tonight."

"I'm coming with you!" Miles

said. "Don't worry," he told Tod. "I'll get your things for tonight. Then we'll get you out on bail first thing tomorrow."

"Mr. Crawford—" Miles blinked at the officer. "Look, don't count on too much. About bail and all that. I mean you're a lawyer, you know about these things. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"This boy, this Jules Herman, he's dead."

Sam gripped Miles shoulder, hard. "You're not driving," he said. "I'll drive you to the precinct, myself. You're a terrible driver, even at the best of times. Come on, Miles."

Sam went to get his coat. Miles had to be lead out of the house like a child.

It was after two a.m. when they returned home. They had accomplished little. They hadn't even seen Tod; he had been booked, fingerprinted, and shut away like a quarantine case. A detective named Raphael had given them ten minutes of his time, but they hadn't learned much more than the bare cold facts. Tod and two other youths had been out on a drinking and driving spree; not the first. There had been an argument; it had been settled on the side of the road, with four-inch knife blades. Tod had won the argument, and Jules Herman, the loser, was

stretched out in the precinct freezer while his divorcee mother wept over his body and blamed her louse of a husband. Now they were back home, and Miles was blaming himself.

"What could I do?" he said, imploring his law partner. "What could I have done different? You know what kind of crazy life I led, Sam. First that Hollywood business, then the Crash, then that nickel-and-dime law office I opened. . . ."

"Cut it out," Sam growled. "Don't eat your heart out. What good does it do?"

"Then came the divorce from Elena. That didn't make it easier. You know that's why I married again, for Tod's sake. You know that, Sam."

"Yeah," Sam said, his bloodhound eyes downcast.

"All right, Fern wasn't a mother type, but you think she didn't try? He's a moody kid, moody and sullen. I couldn't blame her for giving up."

"You ought to be in bed," Sam said.

"I thought things would be different after I was through with pictures. I thought I'd give him a nice, normal life. But this *coldness* in him, Sam, it's like a chronic disease. That's why he drinks so much. They said he was drunk tonight, he didn't know what he

was doing. That'll be in his favor, won't it?"

"You know the law, Miles. Drunk or sober, juries don't like murderers."

Miles pounded the coffee table with his fist. "I'll talk to them myself, Sam, I'll tell them what a rotten father I am. Then they'll see whose fault it is. Mine!"

He put his face in his hands, and Sam got up and went over to him. But Miles wasn't crying, he was just hiding his face. Sam went to the table lamps and turned them off, hinting for Miles to retire. When he turned around, Miles was looking at the patterns in the carpet.

"Why not?" he said softly. "Why couldn't I do that, Sam?"

"Do what?"

"Defend Tod. In court."

"Look, Miles, you're no criminal lawyer. Liabilities, house closings, civil suits, stuff like that, okay. But not this." Sam rubbed at the heartburn in his chest. "Are you serious?"

"Why not?" Miles eyes glittered. "I'm a member of the bar; there's no law against defending a member of your family. Who could do it better? Sure, I'll get a criminal man, somebody to prepare the case, but you know what a jury is, Sam, you've seen enough of them. It's just twelve people, twelve people

you've got to convince. People you have to make *feel* for you. Who could do that better than a father?"

"Do you mean a father? Or an actor?"

"Is that so bad?" Miles said vehemently. "God knows I played a dozen lawyers in pictures. That's what gave me the idea of studying for my degree, after I left Hollywood. I can do it, Sam, I know I can!"

"Look, what do you think this is, a double-feature? This is for real, Miles!"

Miles stood up. "I'll call Charles Macklemore tomorrow. I'll ask him to recommend a good criminal man. Then we'll see."

He limped towards the doorway, leaving his discarded shoes under the sofa. It was late, and he was tired, but he went up the stairs grandly, with dignity, like a star.

Macklemore didn't sound pleased when Miles roused him from sleep at eight the next morning, but he was quickly responsive when he learned the reason. They talked for half an hour. At the end of the conversation, Miles wrote the name of an attorney on the phone pad: EDWIN C. RUTHERFORD, 74 Wall. Macklemore was hardly more enthusias-

tic about Miles' plan than Sam had been the night before, but he didn't prolong the argument. Obviously, he was leaving the job of discussion up to Rutherford.

Rutherford was a loose-limbed, shambling man who seemed to straddle his desk like a horse. He shifted, mumbled, scratched his face and chest as Miles talked. He slapped at flies, ingested coffee noisily from a cardboard container, and his thick, clumsy fingers broke two pencil points as he took notes. But at the conclusion of Miles' summary, Rutherford surprised him with a sharp, concise analysis of Tod's legal situation and possible pleas, and most unexpected, a sympathetic view of Miles' idea for the defense team.

"I don't see why not," he said gruffly. "You're a qualified attorney, even if you haven't handled cases of this nature. Of course, your personal interest in the case might be a hindrance. You know the old adage, 'He who keeps his own counsel has a fool for a lawyer'."

Miles smiled back. "I've got a better quotation for you, Mr. Rutherford. 'Men seldom understand any laws but those they *feel*'. Lord Halifax."

Rutherford swatted an imaginary fly on his blotter.

"And that's what you think you can do, Mr. Crawford? Make them

feel? Arouse their emotions?"

"I'm the boy's father."

"But it's not just that, is it? I mean, Charlie Macklemore once told me that you used to be some kind of actor. In the movies."

"That was a long time ago, Mr. Rutherford, way back in the Twenties. I made my last picture in 1933. I was admitted to the Bar in 1940, and that's been my business ever since."

Rutherford was looking at him oddly.

"All right!" Miles said. "Maybe that's what I do mean. I was an actor. I could make people feel things, that was my job."

"I see."

"I don't want to run your case for you," Miles said. "I just want to play my part." It might have been an unfortunate phrase; Rutherford scowled and scratched himself with evident irritability, but Miles didn't bother to correct it.

"We'll see, about it," the lawyer said. "We'll see how it goes. To me, the big question is the boy. What's his name?"

"Tod."

"Tod," Rutherford said. "I mean, he's got something to say about this, too. How do you know he wants you to do this? It's a murder charge. He's old enough to face the chair. The least you can

do is ask him if he wishes this."

Miles twitched with a sudden doubt.

"Yes," he said. "You're right, of course. I have to ask him."

He saw Tod the next morning. After his indictment by the grand jury, the boy had been transferred to the county prison on Fleet Avenue and had already been smoothly incorporated into the routine. When he came out into the visitor's room, the gray shirt and trousers fitted him too well, and his manner was docile.

"How are you?" Miles said. "How are they treating you?"

Tod shrugged. He seemed bored with the visit already.

"It's going to be all right," Miles said. "I've been talking it over with Rutherford, the lawyer you saw yesterday afternoon. I'm afraid we can't get you out on bail, but—"

"When's this arraignment he told me about?"

"Next week some time. That's when we'll enter our plea for manslaughter. You understand the difference, don't you?"

Tod looked at his hands.

"You see, it's all a matter of premeditation," Miles said, lowering his voice. "That's the big difference between murder and manslaughter, premeditation and provocation. Do you know what I'm talking about? A mutual combat,

as long as the fight wasn't provoked for the purpose of killing, that's what they call a provocative act. Didn't Rutherford tell you?"

"He talked for two hours," Tod said indifferently. "I couldn't follow him very well."

Miles leaned closer. "Listen to me, Tod, I want to ask you something. Something important."

"What?"

"How would you feel if I acted as your defense counsel? Me, personally. Oh, not alone; Rutherford would do all the real work. I'll just be the front man. How would you feel about that, Tod?"

The boy looked bewildered.

"I don't get it. You're no criminal lawyer."

"No, I'm not. I won't be so clever about it, maybe I'll make some stupid mistakes. Rutherford will help me out there, but I could still look pretty stupid. But I think I can make that jury *listen* to me, Tod. I think I can make them—understand." He paused, hurting at the blankness of his son's expression. "I won't do it unless you say it's all right. It's a serious business, I don't have to tell you that. You've got the right to say no."

"You'd do that for me?" Tod said softly.

Miles found his eyes. They were filling with tears.

"Gee, Pop," Tod said.

He put out his hands and clasped the hands of his father. He held on to them, firmly, and looked into Miles' face with wonder and a sort of discovery.

Something happened to Rutherford immediately after Tod's arraignment. The casual, shambling manner disappeared, the soft sleepy eyes became hard and brilliant. The cram course he gave Miles in criminal law turned out to be an ordeal, a combination of lecture, scolding, and castigation. Every day he told Miles that he was making a mistake, that he was playing games with his son's life, that he would make a fool of himself in court. He called Miles an ambulance chaser, and once he called him a movie lawyer, with great contempt. He even threatened to drop the case if Miles displayed any Hollywood theatrics in court. But through it all he managed to build a defense theory, and instructed Miles Crawford in the part of presenting it to a jury.

Rutherford produced references by the stack. He dug quotations from court language, and made Miles listen to paragraph after paragraph.

"Design must precede the killing by some appreciable space of

time. But the time need not be long. It must be sufficient for some reflection and consideration upon the matter, for choice to kill or not to kill, and for the formation of a definite purpose to kill.' That's from the *People vs. Majone*," Rutherford said. "It all depends on what you call deliberation. That's our whole case. Cold blood vs. hot blood, that's what we have to prove."

"But can we? You heard what Tod said. They parked the car. They parked the car and got out and had the fight. They knew what they were doing, Ed!"

"Did they? We've got to show that they didn't. It's a fine line between murder and manslaughter, and we've got to draw it. We've got to show there wasn't any cooling-off period, not a minute's worth. And it won't be easy. I know this fellow Hanley, the prosecuting attorney. He's a tough cookie. He's from the eye-for-an-eye school."

"Maybe you're right," Miles said gloomily. "Maybe you ought to handle the whole thing . . ."

"You really mean that?"

Miles scowled.

"No! You said it yourself, it's not just a bundle of facts. The important thing is what was in Tod's heart. That's what I can do. I can tell them!"

Rutherford sighed resignedly. "Same time tomorrow," he said.

When Miles returned home that evening, he found Jenny flustered with excitement and four reporters parked at his front door. He pushed past them into the house, and Jenny protested vigorously about the invasion. Sam was waiting for him, too, in the living room, and offered to go outside and get rid of them. Miles said no, that he wanted the Press on his side, that it would be good for Tod, and Sam frowned and settled into a corner of the sofa. The reporters were allowed in, accompanied by cries of "wipe your feet!" and "watch those ashes!" from Jenny. They fired questions at Miles, wanting to know his plans for Tod's defense. When they started talking about the movies, Sam, on the sofa, squirmed and grunted, but Miles let them talk.

"What about it, Mr. Crawford?" one of the reporters said. "Didn't you use to play criminal lawyers in pictures?"

"Yes, that's right, but that has nothing to do with this."

"How long you been out of pictures, Mr. Crawford, isn't it almost twenty-five years?"

"Yes, it's about that."

"Miles!" Sam Brody stood up and shook his head in warning.



"Get rid of them, Miles! Now!"

"How about it, Mr. Crawford? You think your experience in the movies will help your son?"

"No, of course not."

"You ever lose a case in the movies?"

"That's a stupid question—"

"You thinking of getting back into pictures, Mr. Crawford?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" He glared at the young reporter who asked this question. "I'm a lawyer, young man, I've been a lawyer for twenty years." The newsman smiled back amiably.

"Isn't this a sort of comeback, Mr. Crawford? I mean, if you give a good performance in court, isn't it possible that some producer—"

The slap came more suddenly than anyone was prepared for. The sound of it hung in the quickly silenced room even as the imprint of Miles' fingers faded from the cheek of the reporter. It was Sam who moved first, moved in and took over, herding the reporters back to the front hallway, smoothing over their indignation and getting them out without answering questions or words of anger.

When he came back to the living room, Miles was in the same place, looking at the hand that struck the blow.

"Have a drink," Sam said. "And next time, don't talk so much. Try

the case in court, not in the papers."

Miles looked at him.

"Sam," he said, "What do you think?"

"I think you're pretty tired."

"I swear that's not my reason, Sam. About the movies, about getting back. I put those ideas away long ago. You know that, don't you?"

"As long as you know it," Sam Brody said.

Then he went to get the drink.

Miles had been in courtrooms before. He had faced jury boxes and judges and argued cases for his clients. But the stakes had never been as high or as meaningful to him before, and when the court was called into session, he was almost prompted to tell Rutherford that he had changed his mind, that he wasn't competent to play this role, that he belonged among the spectators and not within the bar.

But he said nothing. The process of law began, the seating of the jury, the entrance of the judge, solemn in his black robes. Rutherford walked up to the raised desk and handed over a copy of the brief he had prepared, and the prosecuting attorney, Hanley, a surprisingly gentle-appearing man

in his fifties, with fair hair and a scholarly look enhanced by rimless glasses, stood up to make his opening statement. He talked softly, without passion, and his simple, declarative sentences concerning the events of the night in question seemed to interest the jury without moving them. Miles felt more hopeful as he listened; the man was underplaying too much, it was a drab performance. He whispered his opinion to Rutherford, and the attorney shook his head in disagreement. Miles listened more intently then, and knew that Hanley was understating the facts deliberately, keeping the dramatic details in reserve for the statements of witnesses, making a promise of revelations and conclusive evidence to come. By the time he sat down, the jury was still unmoved, but they were eager to be convinced.

Miles and Rutherford had agreed to withhold their statement to the jury for the conclusion of the People's case. It was time for the first testimony.

Hanley was bold. He called the most important witness of all to the stand, the defendant, Tod Crawford.

Tod seemed in a daze. He looked surprised to find himself in the witness chair; he hadn't expected this first call. When Hanley asked him to describe the events of

that night, he stammered them out without order or logic, and had to be led back to sequence by the prosecutor. He told them about the drinking bout; he admitted that it was a frequent event. He named the other two youths who were with him, and related the cause of the argument.

"We were going to see these girls," he said. "They lived on the other side of town. They were giving a party. Juley had a bottle in the car, and we were all drinking. I didn't want him to, because he was driving, and it's not my car, it's my father's. He got sore about that, and that brought up some other things. About one of the girls we knew. That was when he stopped the car and wanted to fight. The other guy, Rudy, pulled us apart, but we were pretty hot. Then somebody suggested we settle it on the road."

"Who?" Hanley said.

"I don't know, I don't remember. But we got out, and I didn't know Juley meant to make a knife contest out of it, not until he showed it. So I took out my knife."

"You always carried a knife?"

"Most of the time."

"Go on."

"That's all there was. We began to fight. Juley cut me first, and then I got him. I didn't know he was dead. I just got back into the

car and drove home. I was pretty upset. I just left both of them there."

"You left the knife in his body?"

"Yes," Tod said. "That's how it was."

At Rutherford's instruction, Miles didn't ask to cross-examine; it was their intention to call Tod as a defense witness later on. Miles got his first chance to perform when the prosecution called Rudy Trask to the stand. Hanley had Trask identify himself as the third youth in the car that night, and then extracted his version of the events. It matched Tod in all respects, but Hanley added one more vital question.

"Mr. Trask, had there been any trouble between Tod Crawford and Jules Herman prior to the night of the slaying?"

"Yes, sir," Trask mumbled.

"What sort of trouble? Had they fought before?"

"Not with knives. They had fist fights."

"Then there was definite animosity between them?"

"On and off."

"What was the cause of their differences?"

"A lot of things. Sometimes girls. Sometimes, it was Tod's old man."

Against a background of murmuring spectators, Miles squirmed

at the defense table, and coughed.

"Juley liked to rib Tod a lot. He used to ask him why he didn't go out to Hollywood and be a movie star, like his father used to be. That always made Tod sore. You never could kid around with Tod much, he didn't like it."

"How serious were these fist fights?"

"Tod sprained Juley's wrist once."

"Was the incident reported to the police?"

"No," Trask said blankly.

"That's all," Hanley said.

It was Miles' turn. He stood up, with more inner quivering than he had ever felt before a camera. He stepped to the witness stand, aware of the intensity of the eyes about him.

"Mr. Trask, how long would you say that my—that Tod Crawford knew Jules Herman?"

"Maybe eight, ten months."

"How often did they see each other?"

"Maybe two, three times a week."

"So then they were really friends, wouldn't you say? Not enemies?"

Hanley stood up and suggested mildly that Miles was asking for a conclusion. The judge agreed.

"This fist fight," Miles said. "The one in which the wrist was sprained. Had they planned to have it, like they 'decided' to have

the knife fight? You should know."

"No. It was just one of those things that happen."

"All of a sudden, out of a clear blue sky?"

"Yeah, I guess you'd say that. Juley jumped Tod, and—"

"You say *Juley* jumped him? Then Juley instigated the fight?"

"Well, Tod called Juley a—"

"Never mind what he called him! Jules Herman made the first aggressive move?"

"That's right."

"Did the same thing happen on the night of September 14? You witnessed the fight, Mr. Trask. Didn't Jules Herman instigate that, too? Didn't he strike the first blow?"

"That's hard to say."

"Didn't Jules Herman slash Tod's arm? Wasn't that the first wound inflicted? Were you watching the fight, Mr. Trask, or weren't you interested?"

"Sure I was watching! Tod was cut first, all right, but that doesn't mean—"

"That's all, Mr. Trask!"

Miles wheeled away from the stand and went quickly back to the defense table. His heart was pounding, and he wasn't seeing straight, but his vision was good enough to take in the expression on Rutherford's face. The smile was minimal, but it was there, and Miles

was cognizant he had done well.

The trouble came on the second day. Hanley came into the courtroom with most of his scholarly reserve gone. His first witness of the day was a red-mouthed, flamboyantly pretty girl named Barbara Riordan; she had an insolent manner and too much makeup for her age, barely seventeen. She was the "girl" of the quarrels between Jules and Tod, and Miles sickened at the sight of the would-be trollop his son had fought over. Rutherford had warned Miles about women witnesses, either out of misogyny or experience; he had claimed that they were born partisans, given to violent, uncompromising loyalty to the side they elected to serve. His warning proved true in the case of Barbara Riordan.

"You saw Jules Herman and Tod Crawford argue?" Hanley asked. "You even saw them fight?"

"I sure did," she said, tossing her hair. "They fought all the time, over anything. Sometimes me," she smiled.

"Yet they were together constantly, weren't they? Didn't you find that strange?"

"Sometimes people are friends because they hate each other." She offered it as an aphorism, and looked pleased.

"You think they hated each other?"

"I know they did."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Not just on account of the quarrels. It was what Tod used to say to me. He once told me he'd kill Juley some day. How do you like that?" She looked defiantly at Tod, and listened with gratification to the courtroom reaction.

"You mean he actually threatened Jules Herman's life?"

"More than once, and that's the truth. He told me that if Juley didn't stay away from me, he'd cut his throat."

Rutherford gave Miles swift instruction about the cross-examination: to deprecate character, to suggest a bias against Tod that would explain her hostile testimony. But when he tried to make the girl admit to a grudge, she smiled sweetly and said:

"Of course I like Tod, I always liked him a lot. I wouldn't want to see him in any trouble. But I couldn't lie about what he told me, could I?" She looked at Miles boldly, aware of the point she had scored.

There were three other prosecution witnesses, all testifying to the wild nature and irresponsibility of Tod Crawford's behavior, to the obvious enmity between him and the dead boy. There was police testimony about the scene of the conflict, the knife that Tod had left

behind in Jules Herman's body, his quick flight home, his arrest, his ready admission of guilt, and, perhaps worst of all, his seeming lack of remorse.

The prosecution took two more days to present its case, and the wall of evidence grew higher, wider, and more impenetrable with every hour. The defense cross-examinations proved dangerous; Rutherford had predicted they would be. Harmful witnesses could be doubly harmful when their statements were repeated and sometimes reinforced by defense questions. Yet there were no alternatives; the defense had no witnesses of its own; they had to use the material on hand.

They pinned their hopes on Tod.

He took the stand at his father's bidding, and harshly, leaning over backwards to show his objectivity, Miles questioned him about the killing of Jules Herman.

"Did you *mean* to kill Jules Herman when you went out on that road?"

"No, I didn't."

"Did you even mean to injure him? Or were you just trying to defend yourself?"

Tod hesitated. "I don't know what I thought. I was drunk, I was all muddled up."

Miles took a deep breath.

"Did you hate Jules Herman?"

"No."

"But you were always fighting, weren't you? Why was that?"

"I don't know. We just seemed to get on each other's nerves. But we made up again, every time." He paused. "Things were better before we met her."

"Do you mean Barbara Rior-dan?"

"Yes."

"Were you in love with this girl?"

"I don't know. A little, maybe."

"Did you ever tell her you wanted to kill Jules?"

"I don't remember saying anything like that."

"Then why do you think she said you did?"

Tod shrugged. "She liked Juley. She hates me for what happened. She wants to get even."

There was a prosecution objection to the answer, and it was sustained.

Miles was sweating heavily; he had lost his sensitivity to cold in the past month; the sweat slid from his forehead to his eyes, and he kept mopping at his face.

"Did you *ever* have any thoughts of killing your friend?"

Tod looked at the floor.

"No," he said. "I told you that."

"Was killing him in your mind the night of the slaying?"

Tod didn't answer. The pause

didn't help; Miles' jaw tightened and he leaned forward.

"Please answer the question!"

"I don't know," Tod said. "I just don't know what I was thinking about when it happened."

"But were you thinking about *murder*?"

Tod's shoulders slumped.

"I wasn't thinking about anything. I just did what I had to do. That's all there was to it."

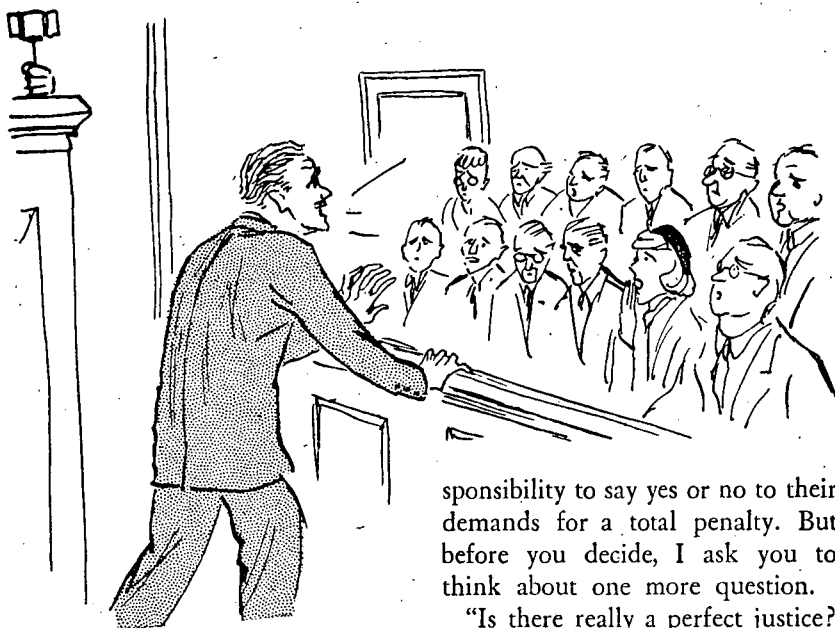
The silence was heavy, even oppressive, in the courtroom. The very air seemed to have changed. A cough in the rear of the room sounded like an explosion.

"That's all," Miles whispered to his son.

He went back to the table, and Rutherford took over. The attorney got to his feet and announced that the case for the defense was concluded. Then he asked the judge for a directed verdict of manslaughter. The judge replied negatively, and told Miles and the attorney to prepare to give their concluding remarks to the jury that afternoon.

"It'll be all right," Miles told Rutherford as they left the courtroom. "You'll see, Ed. I'll make them *feel* for Tod, you see if I don't!"

At two that afternoon, Miles rose



to address the jury. They had been only faces before, alternately hostile and sympathetic, but now they were unified as audience. He stood before them, as if humbled into silence by the weight of the burden he bore. It was a full ten seconds before he began, in a quiet monotone.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, a boy is dead, and men who are the caretakers of human justice are crying out for revenge. You see them here before you, demanding life for life, all in the name of that blindfolded statue who stands outside this courthouse. When you leave this room, it will be your re-

sponsibility to say yes or no to their demands for a total penalty. But before you decide, I ask you to think about one more question.

"Is there really a perfect justice? Complete, impartial, blind to prejudice or special interest? If there is, I say thank God! Thank God that we imperfect human beings have been given such a great gift, such generous forgiveness of our own sins, that we can still mete out perfect justice to other sinners.

"If you have never sinned, not even outside the law's power to punish, then what I have to say is not for you. If you are blameless, never made an error, never wronged someone, never caused a hurt or an injury to another fellow human, you have the right to choose the way and manner of this boy's punishment."

His voice rose, gained in volume.

"If you're ready to close the account books on Tod Crawford—to say that with one moment's action, one movement of his hand, one flicker of his eye, one bewildered second of his existence, he forfeited his right to live, to breathe, to regret, to change, to make reparation for sins past and present—this is your privilege.

"But be sure about what you do!

"Have you ever spoken a hurtful word in anger to your wife, your husband, your child, and then felt sorry? No problem, was it? A kiss, a gentle phrase, and all was well again. Have you ever flung a stone, smashed a dish, shouted a curse? Slapped a cheek? Struck a child? Spoken a lie? Broken a promise? What was your punishment? Remorse, self-torture, recrimination? Yet the book was never closed on your mistakes, the key was never turned on the lock, with never again a chance to say, 'I regret, I am sorry, I will live to be a better person.'

"But this boy did more than break a dish or a promise. He took a life. In a single moment, blind with the meaningless rage of living in a world he didn't understand, he took a life. Premeditated? No more than the angry word, the broken dish, the stone flung or the cheek slapped. Premeditated? De-

liberated? To kill in the sight of witnesses, in the sight of God, under the harsh eyes of a vengeful law?"

He had been shouting; he fought for control; he dropped his voice. He leaned on the edge of the jury box.

"You may close Tod Crawford's account book. The law gives you that right. He is twenty-three years old. Perhaps he is old enough to face a justice diviner than ours.

"But remember this. Before that divine court, Tod Crawford must make this statement: 'My last act on earth was to kill a man who was my friend. I was given no time to do anything more with my life.'"

Miles loosened his fingers from the jury box, and turned slowly. He went back to the defense table, terribly aware of the hushed silence of the courtroom, unable to appraise its meaning.

Then they were applauding. The sound broke like a sudden storm among the spectators, and Miles tried to hide the exultation of the moment, tried to take his seat beside Rutherford without a change of expression. The judge, hesitating for a moment, picked up the gavel and rapped the courtroom into order. The applause died quickly, but its echoes clung.

Hanley was on his feet. He was



calm no longer; he had been moved by the peroration, but only to a tightly-controlled anger.

"Your honor—"

"Yes, Mr. Hanley?"

"Your Honor, in view of the fine response of the, er, spectators to Mr. Crawford's speech, I would like to reserve the closing argument of the prosecution until tomorrow morning."

"Very well, Mr. Hanley. Court is adjourned until ten a.m. tomorrow."

Miles didn't hear the final words of the day; he was watching Rutherford, and Rutherford was watching the jury. Then, as they left the courtroom, the attorney squeezed Miles arm and whispered something Miles couldn't hear. He repeated it in the corridor outside.

"I didn't think it was possible," he said. "I wouldn't have believed it. But I think you did all right in there, Mr. Crawford!"

Hanley, his mouth thin, his briefcase clutched tightly under his arm, passed them; then he stopped and came back, the thin lips turning upwards in a congratulatory smile.

"Good speech," he said to Miles. "You're a talented man, Mr. Crawford, I always thought so."

"Thank you," Miles said.

"Yes, I've always been a fan," Hanley said, his eyes glinting odd-

ly. "You'll remember that, won't you? Even after tomorrow?"

Then he chuckled dryly, and strode away. Rutherford looked after him with worried eyes.

"What is it? What's bothering you?" Miles said.

"I don't know. But I do know Hanley. And in my opinion, that was a threat."

There was something different about the prosecution table the next day; when Miles took his seat beside Rutherford, he regarded the strange clutter of objects curiously, and then, with a shock, recognized their function.

Hanley was on his feet, addressing the court.

"Your Honor, before making my final remarks to the jury, I have a rather unusual request. I make it in the sincere belief that this case, as any other, must be judged upon the facts, and not on the emotional displays of the participants."

The judge twisted his mouth wryly. "I'm sure we all believe that, Counselor. Please go on with your request."

Hanley took an audible breath.

"Your Honor, I would like permission to show a portion of motion picture film to the court."

Rutherford glanced at Miles apprehensively; Miles was staring at the portable screen and projector on the table.

"Is this in the nature of new evidence, Mr. Hanley?"

"No, Your Honor. This is the final reel of a motion picture entitled *The Guilty One*, produced in 1931 by Allied American Studios. I was fortunate in locating the film at a warehouse in Long Island City. It was, I'm afraid, what is commonly known as a "B" picture. It had a very short run, as a second feature. However, I believe this film is relevant, if not to the case of Tod Crawford, then to the conduct of his defense." Hanley stepped forward and dropped his voice to conversational level. "Frankly, Your Honor, the contents of this film might even cast some doubt about the quality of this trial, and I think it is in the best interests of all that it be shown. May I come forward?"

The judge nodded.

Hanley went to the bench, and spoke briefly to the man in the black robes. He seemed startled by what he heard; he ended by consenting to the exhibit.

Rutherford watched Miles. He had sunk into his chair, his eyes glassy, his expression detached. The attorney whispered questions at him, but Miles didn't reply.

A clerk from the prosecuting attorney's office, with the assistance of the bailiff, set up the screen in front of the judge's desk; the pro-

jector was placed on a small table in mid-aisle. The spectators murmured excitedly; the white rectangle of the screen became a question mark. Only Miles remained disinterested, eyes fixed into space.

"We're ready now," the clerk said. The bailiff dimmed the courtroom lights.

And on the screen, there appeared another courtroom.

A jury of actors sat in the box. A gray-haired professional presided gravely as the judge. And, stepping forth to address the make-believe jury, was the youthful, dark-haired, slim figure of Miles Crawford. Age: thirty. Profession: Star.

There was a momentary difficulty with the sound; then it emanated loudly from the projector's speaker, filling the real and the cinematic courtroom with the actor's rich, emotion-laden voice.

"A boy is dead!" the movie lawyer said. "A boy is dead, and the men who are the caretakers of human justice are crying out for revenge. You see them here before you, demanding life for life, all in the name of that blindfolded statue who stands outside this courthouse . . ."

Rutherford gripped Miles' arm. On the screen, the youthful defendant, smoothly handsome even in the wide-shouldered, wide-la-

peled fashion of the Thirties, put his hand over his troubled eyes.

"Justice?" the actor said to the camera. "Complete? Impartial?"

The murmur was growing in the courtroom, the realization of what was being seen and heard, the terrible meaning.

"... but if you have never sinned, not even outside the law's power to punish, then what I have to say is not for you. If you're blameless, never made an error, never wronged someone, never caused a hurt or an injury ..."

"Make them stop," Miles said to the attorney. "For God's sake, Ed, make them stop it!"

"Your Honor!" Rutherford shouted. "Your Honor, please—"

"... one flicker of his eye, one bewildered second of his existence," Miles Crawford said on the screen, "he forfeited his right to live, to breathe, to regret, to change, to make reparation for sins past and present—"

"Stop it!" Miles screamed.

Hanley said something to the clerk; there was a hurried movement to the light switches in the back of the courtroom, and a hand flicked the device that made the light die on the screen, and the picture faded into blank, unaccusing whiteness.

Hanley came back to the bar, his face solemn.

"Your Honor, I see no reason for continuing the film at this point, and am happy to accede to the request of the defense." He turned to Miles. He didn't look triumphant, but neither was he ashamed. "I have always been an ardent fan of Mr. Crawford's. I couldn't help but recall something familiar about his fine address to the jury. Fortunately, I was able to remember where I had heard it before. I have not shown it to embarrass Mr. Crawford. I have shown it because of what I said earlier, in the interests of having the *facts* determine the outcome of this trial, and not the emotional power of a—very fine performer."

He went back to his seat.

Miles was still standing, looking helplessly at the faces turned to him, asking unspoken questions too difficult for answers.

"Your Honor," he said hoarsely. "Your Honor, it's true. The speech wasn't mine. It was written for me, many years ago. I used it because it made sense to me then, as it does now. I used it because it was the only thing I thought of saying ..."

The response was silence. He saw Tod's face, once again blank, uncaring, resigned. In the last few moments, he had lost his role as his son's defender; he was the Actor, the Star that Tod despised.

"I've deceived you," Miles said. "I've made you feel foolish, and made myself even more of a fool. I admit that, I can't avoid the blame. But don't make Tod suffer for it, not my son. Don't punish him when I'm the one who should be punished . . ."

He turned to the jurybox, and met the cold, impassive faces he feared to see. There was nothing more to say. He took a step in the direction of his chair.

Then he stopped.

"Wait a minute. Wait." He pointed at the man who was taking the projector from the table in the center of the aisle. "Your Honor, if I could say something—"

"Go ahead, Mr. Crawford, no one's stopping you."

He came closer to the bench. "Your Honor, in the name of fairness—"

The judge stiffened.

"Since you were good enough to permit the prosecution to show this film, will you permit it to be shown to its conclusion? Will you allow that?"

"I hardly see the point, Mr. Crawford."

"There's one more scene, Your Honor, after the trial episode. One final scene. May it be shown?"

Hanley grunted and went to assist in the disassembly of the screen. "Your Honor, I hadn't intended

to turn this courtroom into a movie theatre. I merely wanted to show —"

"Pleasel!" Miles said. "It's only fair! Show the film to its conclusion. Let them see what happens. To him, to the boy in the case. I beg you!"

The judge rubbed his lips, faced with a curious problem of equal treatment. Then he sighed, and said:

"Very well. Since I acceded to the first request, perhaps it is only right that I accede to yours. Mr. Hanley, you will instruct your assistant to show the reel to its completion."

"But Your Honor—"

"Please comply, Mr. Hanley."

The prosecutor shrugged, and then signaled to his clerk with an airy gesture. The projector was readied once more, and Miles went over and fixed the reel into place himself, keeping his finger on the knob that produced sound from the film track. The lights were dimmed, and he threw the switch that cast the pictures on the screen.

It was the end of the trial scene. The jury was filing into the box, and the foreman was rising to present its verdict to the court.

"We, the jury, find the defendant guilty as charged . . ."

The scene faded.

The setting was a death cell.

On the narrow bunk, the boy sat with head in hands, awaiting the hour of his last judgment.

The cell door opened, and the prison chaplain entered. His face was solemn; he came to offer consolation, not hope. He dropped a hand on the boy's shoulder, and the boy wept. The chaplain opened the Bible in his hand, and read the words that would introduce the condemned man to eternity.

The Warden entered, flanked by two prison guards. There was no news of reprieve. The time of the execution had been fixed at eleven o'clock. It was ten minutes to the hour.

The boy stood up. He put his arms out in supplication. He sobbed, and swore repentance, and pleaded in the name of his dead mother for mercy. The Warden's face was moved, but he was powerless to act. Gently, he pushed the arms aside, and spoke to the guards.

It was time to prepare him. The boy's shoes were removed and carpet slippers were placed on his feet. His trousers were slit. He was

taken by the arms, his body sagging between the guards.

Then the march began. Slowly, to the sepulchral music of the chaplain's mumbled prayers, to the sound of the boy's sobbing voice, begging for the right to live another day, another hour, another moment.

They reached the small door at the corridor's end, and disappeared inside. When the door clanged shut, the scene faded, and it was  
THE END.

The lights went up, and in the sudden vacuum of sound and motion, Ed Rutherford sought out the faces of the jury, to witness, if possible, the result of verdict not yet cast.

Their decision was made after less than an hour's deliberation. It sent Tod Crawford to prison for a term of not more than twenty years on the charge of manslaughter. It was greeted with tears by Miles Crawford, but he brushed them aside as he took his son into his arms for a loving embrace.





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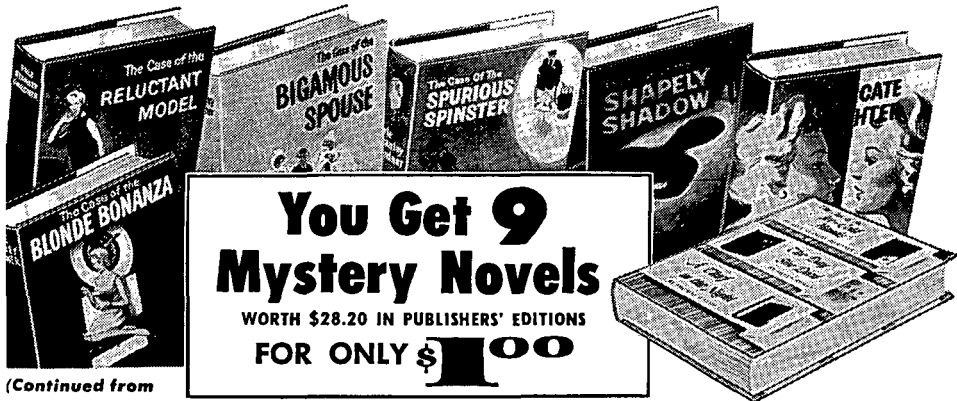
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